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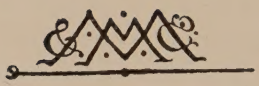
THE CHARM OF THE ROAD

ENGLAND AND WALES



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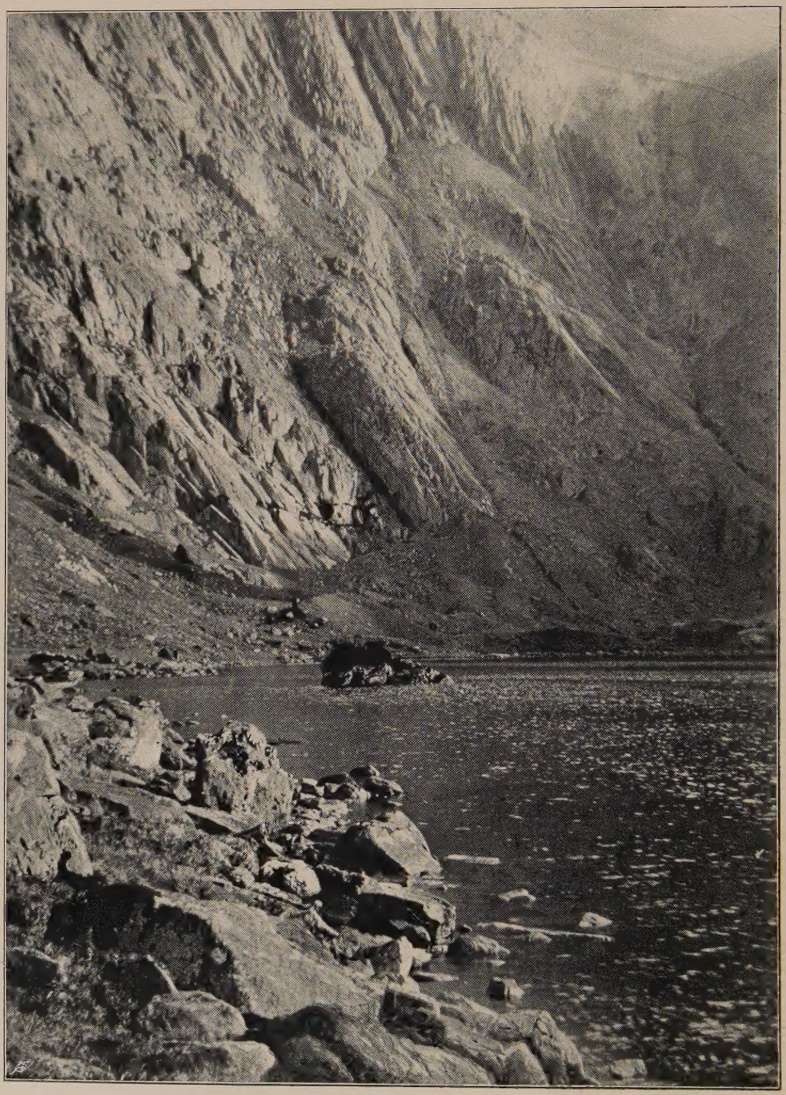

A WELSH LLYN.

THE CHARM OF THE ROAD

ENGLAND AND WALES

BY

JAMES JOHN HISSEY

AUTHOR OF
'AN ENGLISH HOLIDAY,' 'ON THE BOX SEAT,'
'OVER FEN AND WOLD,' 'UNTRAVELLED ENGLAND,' ETC.

WITH TWENTY-EIGHT FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND A MAP

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1910

TO

MY MANY UNKNOWN FRIENDS

IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING LANDS

ACROSS THE SEAS

We change our skies above us,
  But not our hearts that roam ;
Our wistful mothers taught us
  To call Old England home.

PREFACE

"I TRAVEL not to go anywhere, but to go," says Stevenson; and it was in this spirit, the spirit of the true wanderer, that we took the pleasant pilgrimage recorded in the following pages. To us the destination was a trivial detail, left to settle itself each day; the joy of the journey was the thing, therein our pleasure lay. We started forth without any premeditated plan, for a plan is apt to prove a worry to keep, and this was purely a holiday jaunt, and perfect freedom was the essence of it.

Speed formed no part of our programme. "Speed," says Richard le Gallienne, "is a method by which we miss as much as possible between our starting-point and our destination," and we desired to miss nothing on our way that was worth seeing. We did not trouble about guide-books, for we were minded not to go anywhere nor to see anything under compulsion, but we provided ourselves with

good maps, and these sufficed our needs. We remembered Emerson's advice—

> See thou bring not to field or stone
> The fancies found in books;
> Leave authors' eyes, and use your own;

and we acted upon it.

I am a traveller in my own country, and I make no apology for the fact, for I think it the most beautiful in the world, as well worth seeing as any other, and better than many, at least that is my impression after having travelled far and wide in foreign lands. "Proximorum incuriosi, longinqua sectamur," says Pliny the Younger.

Give me the open road, the wide sky above, an unknown country before me, even though it be but a portion of England, a sympathetic companion with whom to exchange ideas, ample leisure to loiter on the way, a reliable car to travel in, and I ask no greater favour of the gods, or man. I know it has been said, "Notwithstanding one or two classical instances to the contrary, it is almost impossible to make a living work out of the account of a journey." This is a hard dictum for the author of a travel book, still, if mine give but passing pleasure, I must needs be content with its brief day.

For the rest, not to extend my preface, permit me now, kind reader, to refer you to the simple story of our wanderings as recorded in this volume, to which, I trust, my photographs of scenes and places of interest we came to may lend an added interest.

J. J. HISSEY.

TREVIN TOWERS,
EASTBOURNE.

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THE CHARM OF THE ROAD

CHAPTER I

The wander-fever—Maps *versus* guide-books—The charm of road travel—Chance company on the way—Marsh-lands—The art of seeing—A lonely inn—Old-time romance—"The hills of the South Country"—Red-running waters—The Sussex iron age—A land of health—The storied past—An ancient superstition.

For a fortnight past, or more, the weather had been ideal, soft sunshine, blue skies, and balmy winds having all the while prevailed. A May more genial than its wont would in another day give way to "the merry month of June." After the welcome spell of sunshine and warm airs, the country was looking its leafiest and loveliest; a fact that forthwith brought an attack of wander-fever strong upon me. Nor did I attempt to resist it. Why should I? Does not Hazlitt state that "one of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey"? (by the context it is clear he means in England); and June is surely beyond cavil the most delightful month for wayfaring; and to enjoy "one of the pleasantest things in the world" in the pleasantest period of the year is surely a joy worth striving for?

So mused I to myself one still, starlit evening as I mooned alone in my tranquil garden indulging in a postprandial pipe. To-morrow, thought I, will be June; the days are long, the weather fine, the barometer steady; my time is fortunately my own; to act is to live; why should I not start forth a-touring the following morning? Nor was I troubled as to how I should travel; for was I not the lucky possessor of a reliable little motor car in which to tour, an old and trusted friend that had been many a long and successful journey with me, in foul weather as well as fair, over all sorts and conditions of roads; one that had never faltered at any hill, however steep or rough that hill might be; one that had never broken down on the way; so that I felt as sure as I could be of anything in this uncertain world, of arriving without misadventure anywhere I wished to go. It need not take long to pack the car—to-morrow I would be off!

Then I went indoors in search of my wife to moot my suddenly conceived project to her, desirous, if possible, to secure her pleasant companionship on the journey. Women, I am aware, are more cautious by nature than men, not so ready to rush at an idea, however good that idea may for the moment seem. Therefore I approached the subject diplomatically. "I feel a change would do you a lot of good," I suggested; "the weather is so temptingly fine, what say you to us both starting forth on a motor tour?" "It would be delightful," she replied; "perhaps in a week's time I could manage to get away; there are so many things to arrange about the children and

the house, that a man little wots of, before one can leave home. To-morrow would be quite impossible; you men are so impetuous and unreasonable." I felt that there was some truth in the rejoinder; but the weather was so propitious, the attack of wander-fever so severe, that I made light of all difficulties, real or presumed (it was easy to do this for the difficulties were not mine), quoting the old proverb, "Nothing is impossible to a willing mind." I hold those ancient sayings in great respect, and never fail to make use of them to further my views. They carry with them a delightful air of authority. "Besides," I remarked, "the world will turn round just the same, even though we go a-touring; and as for the children, they are no more likely to catch the measles or whooping-cough when we are away from home than if we remained there—

> Our apprehensions mar our days
> More than our sorrows do."

I think that last quotation settled the discussion in my favour. "Of course I know I am a little unreasonable," I conceded, "but it is such a relief to be unreasonable at times; and, after all, difficulties were made to be overcome." So as we chatted on, mountains became molehills, my special pleadings prevailed, one by one the supposed impediments vanished into thin air, and it was mutually agreed that we would pack the motor car the following morning and set forth on our wanderings.

"Now that we have settled to go, where shall we go?" queried my wife; "I suppose you have some

idea on the subject?" But I was fain to confess I had not given that important, or unimportant, detail as much as a passing thought. "Let us decide to come to no decision as to our route," I replied; "we have all England before us, and Wales and Scotland too, for that matter, without any sea to cross; we have only to follow the road from our own door, why fetter ourselves with any prearranged plan which, after the trouble of making it, we should probably never keep? Let us be free to wander where we will, taking the fortune of the highway and the lane, just driving from time to time in whatever direction the country looks the most inviting, or the mood of the moment inclines. With our luncheon basket on board we shall be happily independent of an inn during the day; the only thing we need trouble about is to find one for the night; and if we do not care for the first that materialises, as a car never tires, we can readily drive on till we come to another to our liking."

"Certainly," exclaimed the better half of "we," "all this makes interesting conversation, but if you really mean to start to-morrow, had we not better stop the talking and see to the packing of our things?" Which was wise philosophy. Then I looked up my camera, sketch-book, fishing-rod, maps, rugs, not forgetting the luncheon basket, so that nothing might be left behind in the hurry of departure. I did not trouble about guide-books. Better than guide-books are reliable maps; these are helpful and suggestive, but not dictatorial—they leave you to do your own romancing. "I am told," remarks Steven-

son, "that there are people who do not care for maps, and I find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the courses of the roads and rivers, the prehistoric footsteps of man still distinctly traceable up hill and down vale, the mills and the ruins, the ponds and the ferries, perhaps the Standing Stone or the Druidic Circle on the heath; here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or twopence-worth of imagination to understand with." Truly a good map is a desirable companion; it affords a sufficiency, but not a wearisome excess of information, and it does not talk to you. "'I delight in a map,' said Mr. Pinchbold, eagerly opening one, and spreading it out upon the floor. 'I like to pick out all sorts of strange lonely-looking places, and imagine what they are like. . . . Let us go somewhere. Why, in the name of goodness, don't we travel?'" So, it may be remembered, remarked Mr. Fudge's companion in Collins's *A Cruise upon Wheels*.

It may seem a somewhat curious statement to make, but, to my mind, a guide-book robs a tour of half its pleasure. I prefer to make my own discoveries unaided; perfect freedom is the foundation of a real holiday, to ensure which it is essential neither to go anywhere nor to see anything under compulsion. The chief charms of a journey lie in exploring, so that you may have the delight of, ever and again, coming upon the unexpected and the unfamiliar. Now to be prepared beforehand for what you are going to see is to destroy this charm, and probably to court disappointment; besides one takes

a special kind of personal pride in what one discovers for oneself, that enhances its attractions and causes oftentimes even ordinary things to appear strange and memorable.

Not the least of the joys of a motoring or driving holiday is the stimulus given to the mind by its constant surprises, and the happy state of expectancy as to what hidden possibilities may lie beyond each fresh bend of the road. So the interest of the observant wayfarer need never flag. Who has not, at some time or another, when driving through a strange country, experienced a subtle thrill of pleasure in coming unexpectedly upon a bit of impressive scenery, some beauty-spot that seems more like an artist's dream than a reality, or, it may be, a ruined castle grey with years, grim relic of the feudal days, or a moated manor-house whose hoary walls are suggestive of some unrecorded romance, or a rambling time-toned farmhouse telling of long peaceful abiding, or a quaint and ancient many-gabled hostelry abounding with traditions of the coaching age, or even simply a wayside cottage? —to mention merely a few of the many good things that the pilgrim in rural England is ever coming upon. It only needs the eyes to see, and a heart to understand, to rejoice in the poetry of the open road, for the poetry is there though not in printed verse.

Again it has to be remembered that people, apart from places, have their interest. He is but a poor traveller who cannot find entertainment, information, and food for thought amongst the country folk

fortune throws in his way: many an odd character worthy of study is frequently to be met with on the road. One seldom need be dull for lack of company thereon, if not too exacting as to its quality; even a tramp has oftentimes an amusing individuality, though he is no saint and could give points to Ananias in the matter of untruthfulness.

Then the chance guests gathered at the inn occasionally provide rewarding conversation; to say nothing of the worthy landlord or chatty waiter thereof, who, if of the right sort, will amuse one with all the local gossip, or scandal, free of charge. It is the minor incidents and sights of the road, the meeting with kindred spirits, if only for one brief hour, which are beyond the scope of the guide-book to give; and it is such incidents, sights, and fortuitous meetings that add to the interest of the wanderer, and linger long and pleasurably in his memory. Truly the traveller never knows his luck in this respect; but, from time to time, whilst taking my ease at remote country inns where every one soon becomes on a friendly footing, I have come upon quite a number of charming people, some famous in the world of arts and letters; and it is always interesting to meet and converse with those who have made a name for themselves in the world.

On my very first lengthened tour, taken many long years ago, when I tramped contentedly about the land with a knapsack only, I chanced upon no less a personage than Herbert Spencer; and during the three dreary stormy days I was weather-bound at my primitive hostel I enjoyed long talks with

him about matters too deep for my clear comprehension, yet how delightful it was simply to converse with so great a thinker,—and this was only the beginning of many similar interesting experiences.

It was certainly somewhat unkind of Fate to decree that on the following morning, after the long spell of fine weather and after all our hurried preparations for departure, it should rain, and that determinedly. However, as my wife exclaimed, "It would be really too provoking, with all our arrangements made, the bustle of them over, and the motor packed, not to start." So we put the car hood up, donned our waterproofs, and were off. Truly it was not a propitious start; but we were in holiday mood and not inclined to wait upon the whim of the weather. The rain, however, settled one point for us, namely, the direction we should take; the wind was blowing from the west, so towards the east we drove in order to secure the full shelter of the hood. A truly haphazard way of touring, yet it had its advantages.

Where we should find ourselves that night we had no idea, and happily no care, for as long as we came to a fairly comfortable inn, the more homely the better, what mattered it? Though we set out for nowhere in particular, we knew that, in due course, we should arrive at a good many places, and that knowledge sufficed. In spite of the rain, we were happy to be on the road, the free and pleasant road that leads one everywhere.

As we motored away from our home at East-

bourne we presently reached the wide, flat, exposed expanse of the Pevensey Marshes, over which the wind swept unrestrained and moistly cool. Fortunately the rain had fined down to a Scotch mist, for the open marshes did not even afford the poor protection of a hedge, the fences on either side of our road taking the form of reed-grown dykes. Such wide level prospects need the bright light of unshadowed sunshine to bring forth their drowsy beauties; they are essentially summer lands, best to be appreciated on sunshiny days.

Years ago Coventry Patmore sent me a little book he had then recently written in which he dilates enthusiastically about the quiet charms of the Sussex marshes, and from this I venture to quote as follows: "The beauty of these marsh views is beyond all description, and has never been expressed even in painting. What strikes me as being most characteristic and least noticed in these views is the effect of sunshine. You look over miles without a shadow. They abound with the peaceful and touching charms which render the plain more than a rival to the mountain . . . the infinite repose which is the natural expression of any apparently boundless level. I have looked upon these marshes year after year, and always with new delight. To me the Sussex marshes excel, in truly artistic beauty, the scenery alike of Holland, Switzerland, and Italy." So writes an English poet of the little-esteemed attractions of these marshes, but their tranquil beauties are not for every one, they are far too subtle. On the other

hand, Rousseau says, "Never can a flat country, though ever so beautiful, appear so in my eyes; I must have torrents, fir trees, dark woods, mountains to climb, and rugged roads with precipices on either side to alarm me." Fashion apart, for there is a fashion in most things, scenery is a matter of sentiment and association. The simple horizon lines of the plain are suggestive of repose; the complex, curved, and uprising lines of the mountain and the crag are, on the other hand, exciting to the mind. Our admiration of a landscape depends upon our individual idiosyncrasies, even upon the weather at the time, and more than all upon the mood of the moment. Mountains depend greatly on the cloud and the storm for their impressiveness, but the placid plain demands the sunshine and fair weather. To me the chief charm of a wide plain lies not so much in the plain itself as in the inspiriting brightness of the overarching sky above stretching from one dim, dreamy distance to another.

But to return to ourselves, that morning the marshes looked dreary enough to disgust even a Dutchman, who, unlike Rousseau, prefers his scenery flat and objects to mountains as obstructing the view. It was a damp, dismal, dripping world through which our deserted, dyke-bordered road stretched away ahead in long curving parallels lessening to the hazy horizon. Not a cheerful prospect; but one cannot command all good things on a tour. A prospect, low in tone, like an old master's landscape that has become dimmed with age and grey.

The plaintive cries of whirling gulls, the soughing of the wild wind amongst the tall reeds and sedges uprising from the dykes, mingled with the subdued murmuring of the summer waves on the shingly shore, for the sea was not far off, served to emphasise the general dreariness; the sounds were attuned to the scene. Nature never errs in her harmonies. There is a halting couplet that runs thus,

> Seagull, seagull, keep out on the sea sand,
> It's never good weather when you're inland.

And the many gulls circling about tokened ill, if the saying were to be relied upon.

Still, in spite of all, we managed to enjoy the drive. The very loneliness, and the sea-like level extent of the marshes, so expressive of solitude and space, were not without a certain glamour; then there was a feeling of restfulness in the quiet gloom, the absence of any glare; moreover, the dimly outlined distance beheld through the misty rain had an air of mystery, and mystery "lends enchantment to the view." There is a certain poetic charm about the indefinite that no clearly revealed detail can ever give. I think the reason why an artist's rough sketch so often pleases more than his finished picture is that in the sketch so much perforce is left to the imagination, and the mind rejoices, at times, to be free from hard facts, so that it can do a little romancing on its own account. In that vague beyond whither we were tending; in a scenic sense, all things seemed possible "delusion afar,

delight anear." Without imagination travel would be but a dull progression. Much of the pleasure of a journey lies in the ideals we create for ourselves, and that we always hope to find somewhere in the magic far away, and the joy that comes of the rare attainment of our desires.

It is the poetry that an artist puts into his picture, not the paint on the canvas, that pleases; so the charm of many a scene, or place, lies as much in the vision of the beholder as in the object before him. Beauty comes from within us as well as from without. Much depends upon the little-cultivated art of seeing; there is, too, an art of seeing only those things we desire to see, and being conveniently blind to those things we do not wish to see.

Still, though the marshes were dreary enough, the air of them was so pure, fresh, and soothing, that to inhale it was an exhilaration, and the mere act of breathing became a pleasure. The uncommon fragrance of the many marsh-flowers and green-growing things was borne along on the soft west wind; and the frequent salt whiffs that wafted by gave us a sense of the unseen sea and the mystery of it.

Who can tell beforehand what the much-abused English climate may do in the way of surprises? Monotonous for long it seldom is, and I, for one, rejoice in such assured changefulness. As we drove on a sudden transformation in the weather took place, as welcome as unexpected. A warm yellow light first made its presence felt, quickly followed

by a gleam of watery sunshine; then the mists, as if by magic, melted away, a patch of pure sky became visible, gradually expanding till all above was bright and blue. Soon the sun shone forth in all the glory of a fair June day, flooding the far-reaching marshes with luminous light; and what so short a time ago was but a dull and dreary world of sombre greens and greys, intersected by dismal dykes of leaden hue, was bursting with colour and brilliancy. It was well worth suffering the rain and the mist for that revelation of beauty. All around the long, lank grasses, the feathery sedges, and the bending reeds were laden with drops of moisture that glowed and sparkled in the sunshine, as though all the land were strewn with opals and diamonds. Nature is prodigal in her effects when she chooses; some days she colours the whole distance with miles of the purest ultramarine, vastly more beautiful and brilliant of tint than the artist's pigment costing a guinea an ounce or so.

Just where the marshes ended and the wooded hills began to rise steeply above them, we noticed a primitive and lonely little inn that struck a pathetic note because of its loneliness. Whence came its custom was an enigma, for it had a miles-from-anywhere look, and the marshes were uninhabited. It was the sort of lone spot and lone inn to appeal to one of the old school of sensational novelists wherewith to start the action of a thrilling romance. Even more modern Stevenson has confessed that he could never get over his hankering after a low, black-beamed ceilinged room in a remote

wayside tavern as a telling spot to inaugurate a story. Such is the sentiment of place.

When we passed by, it only needed the inevitable solitary grey-cloaked horseman—why were they always grey-cloaked, I wonder?—suddenly appearing on the forsaken road to form a fitting prelude to an eventful episode. But though the scene was set, we could not command the actor. I wonder how the gentlemen of the road would have dealt with motor cars had they been of their day?

We are told that in the eighteenth century fashionable Londoners and invalids were induced by Dr. Russell's praises of the bracing Brighthelmstone air to risk "the perilous journey" through the wilds of Sussex to that place. "The perilous journey" to Brighton—ye modern motorists, think of that! A lengthened driving tour in those days should have provided plenty of excitement. A time there was when a true glamour of romance hung about the road, yet who would care to have the hands of the clock turned back and the romance revived. They were picturesque days, doubtless, but they had their drawbacks.

Leaving the lonely inn, we struck upon a narrow road that climbed directly to the skyline above, and soon found ourselves high up in the world with a high horizon around; and the wide views revealed over land and sea were worthy of the climb. We were on

> The great hills of the South Country
> That stand along the sea.

A land blest that day with a largess of light and

sunshine. Sleepy and silly are terms I have often heard applied to Sussex, but I think sunny would be a more truthful one, for when the sun shines anywhere in England, you may feel fairly sure of finding it shining there. Sleepy or stupid the Sussex folk are not, according to my experience, though quiet mannered and slow of speech—perhaps more given to thinking than talking, for which I esteem them. A quiet man is not necessarily a stupid one.

Then we motored on, careless of direction, taking first this road and that as fancy dictated; it saved us the trouble of consulting our map; and as we had no special destination in view, where would have been the use of consulting it? Even the sign-posts were disregarded; we had no desire to be directed. So in time we came to a tree-shaded, winding road, bounded on one side by a wild and extensive park—a park beautiful with undulating woods and great glades of grass and bracken; this we discovered to be Ashburnham.

The road appeared to be but little travelled, and it had a pleasant look, so by the side of a stretch of waste ground, graced by a clump of Scotch firs, we were tempted to halt awhile. In all fair England one could hardly hope to find a more rural or a more peaceful resting spot; not a human habitation was in sight, and but for the roadway and park palings there was no sign of man's handiwork; nothing to reveal the century we were in, we might have been travellers in the Elizabethan days for all our eyes could tell. The only sounds we heard

were the joyous songs of birds mingled with the sur-sur-surring of the wind amongst the trees, and "There is in souls a sympathy with sounds." The modern world, how far away it seemed, nor did we wish it nearer. We were in a land of rest. It was difficult to realise that this retired and tranquil region was once the site of flourishing iron furnaces, its air polluted with their poisonous fumes and darkened by their sulphurous smoke.

The present generation seem to have forgotten that Sussex, now so purely agricultural or pastoral, except for its fringe of seaside resorts, was for over three centuries the Black Country of England; but such it was; indeed, iron ore was mined by the Romans there. In the reign of Henry VIII. ancient chroniclers relate that "great cannones and shottes were cast in Sussex to supply his Maj^ties stores." In his day, quaint old Fuller remarked, "It is almost incredible how many great guns are made of the iron in this country." Camden, at the end of the sixteenth century, also wrote, "Sussex is full of iron mines where, for the making and founding thereof, there be furnaces on every side; to which purposes divers brooks are brought to run in one channel that they might be of power sufficient to drive hammer-mills, which beating upon the iron, resound all over the places adjoining." It is recorded that the Sussex forges supplied three thousand horse-shoes for the king's army, "only to be left behind at Bannockburn"; and we further learn that the parsons of the period were accustomed to take their tithes of iron. Such is the picture presented to us of

Sussex in olden times, one in startling contrast with its uncommercial present.

Ashburnham was the last iron furnace in the county to be closed down, and this happened as late as 1828. The reason for this being the drunken habits of the foundry men, who had no difficulty in providing themselves with a plentiful supply of Hollands from the smugglers, in return for the assistance they cheerfully gave those early-day free-traders. Otherwise, possibly, the Ashburnham furnaces might have existed for some considerable time longer, for the Ashburnham iron was in much demand, being the toughest in England, fully equal to the Swedish metal, considered the best in the world.

Owing to the quantity of iron in the soil, many of the Sussex streams run red after rain, a fact that doubtless gave rise to the ancient tradition that "at times the ground weeps blood." According to that medieval chronicler, William of Newbury, "In the Plaine neere Hastings, where the Norman William after his victorie found Harold slaine, thereabout is a place which after raine always looks red, attributed to the bloudy sweat of the earthe, as crying to heauen for Reuvenge of so great a slaughter." Drayton in his ponderous *Polyolbion* thus refers to this, giving the place a name:

> And Asten, once distain'd with native English blood;
> Whose Soyle, when yet but wet with any little raine,
> Doth blush; as put in mind of those there sadly slaine.

I cannot discover Asten on my Ordnance map, but Ashburnham Furnace and Ashburnham Forge are

plainly marked thereon in spite of the many years that have passed since they existed.

The county abounds in iron ore. In 1866 M. A. Lower—the learned antiquary and authority on things Sussex—wrote: "Within the last few years there has been a great deal of inquiry as to the practicability of working our still far from exhausted iron strata. I have been in correspondence on the subject with iron-masters in various parts of Great Britain. The present difficulty appears to be the question—'Shall coal be brought to Sussex iron, or shall Sussex iron be carried to distant coal?'" I devoutly trust, that if either takes place, it will be the latter, and that the blue skies of sunny Sussex will never again be polluted and darkened with the smoke of furnaces, nor its gracious country disfigured by them. Sussex is to-day, apart from a few districts whereon the modern builder has unhappily set his stamp, a delightful land of bright skies, of pure bracing breezes and rural pleasantness—a land to love and a land of health. Let us keep, at least, this one favoured corner of England sweet and clean and beautiful.

Sussex people, both of high and low degree, are given to long abiding in one place. I do not fancy that any of the Pilgrim Fathers set out from that pleasant land. Frequently have I noticed that, in its towns and villages, the names on the ancient tombstones of the churchyards, some of them uncommon, still prevail amongst their inhabitants of to-day. The Ashburnhams are a notable and noble example of this, who, Fuller remarks, are "a family

of stupendous antiquity." According to the old chronicles, Bertram de Eshburnham was Constable of Dover at the time of the Norman invasion, and was beheaded by the Conqueror for holding out against him after the battle of Hastings. John Ashburnham, some centuries later, was groom of the bedchamber to Charles I. and attended that unfortunate king on the scaffold. After the execution, he was given the monarch's watch, his blood-stained shirt, and the sheet that was thrown over his body; these relics were eventually bequeathed to the parish of Ashburnham "for ever," and were placed in the village church, and remained there for many years; but for better safety, some one having stolen the outer case of the watch, they were finally removed to Ashburnham Place, and are no longer to be seen by the curious.

When exhibited in the church the shirt was frequently touched by sufferers from the king's-evil, on the supposition that they would be cured by so doing. The last touching took place as late as 1860. I had no idea that this special and ancient superstition had lasted so long, but in the country-side old crusted superstitions die uncommonly hard. The rural folk are very reticent to strangers about their beliefs (the more ignorant the more reticent), so that it is almost impossible for the casual traveller to glean how much old-time superstition still prevails in remote places; I fancy a good deal more than many people imagine. Only a few years ago a rector of a purely agricultural parish confided to me that, after some years, he discovered several of

his poorer parishioners hung "witch-stones" in their cottages as a protection against witches. A "witch-stone," which I had never heard of before, I learnt was simply a small stone of any kind with a round hole through it,—the hole must be round and natural. The stone has to be come upon unexpectedly, not sought for, otherwise there is no virtue in it.

For those who delight in the search of old-world superstitions, quaint legends, curious folk-lore, and wise sayings, the West Country still remains a profitable and happy hunting-ground. By the West Country I mean, generally, the land that lies beyond the Cotswolds, the more to the west the richer the gleanings.

CHAPTER II

Tramps and their ways—A character—A land of pines—The silence of the uplands—Solitude and space—The real country—A freak in building—An eccentric squire—Romance *versus* reality—A remote spot—A story in stone—A fine view.

STROLLING down the lane, in search of any specially picturesque bit to sketch or photograph, I unexpectedly came upon a tramp comfortably reclining at ease on a grassy bank and in the shade of an overhanging tangled hedge. A tramp, thought I, in search of work and with so little strain in the search that he can lie idle half the day or more, in blissful contentment. When I got quite close to him I noticed he was munching a dry crust of bread,—this I could not choose but see. I should have passed him by without a word, for I have been so taken in with the plausible and pathetic tales that various tramps have poured into my unwilling ears, to the parting with many good pence of the realm, that I long ago made the determination never to listen to their tales of invented woe again. But this tramp did not beg, as is the custom of his tribe, he merely bade me, in a quiet voice, "Good-day"; and not to be less civil than he, I returned his salutation.

I know not how it was, but having intended to pass him unregarded by, I found myself stopping there in front of him. For a tramp, he was clean of face, and though his clothes were much patched and shabby, they were not excessively dirty; his hair was grey, he had clear blue eyes, and he had a gentle voice, with no whine about it. So there I stopped, though half ashamed to witness him dining off a dry crust. "Come from far?" I queried. He looked up and smilingly replied, "Not very far, only ten miles or so. I'm not so young as I was, and a long tramp tires me. It's such a lovely day, I thought I would take it easy; besides, work don't suit my constitution, and why should a man work if it injures his health? A crust of bread and a drink of water is all I need, and somewhere to sleep at night. I don't ask much of the world. Man lives but once, and why should he spoil the pleasure of living by work if he can manage without it?"

Truly this tramp was refreshingly original and strangely frank; he did not beg nor claim my pity; instead of the usual query (with the view of raising a stranger's sympathy and in the hopes of extracting a copper or two), if I knew of any one who would give him a job, etc., he boldly proclaimed that he did not want work. A lazy fellow manifestly, yet he interested me, and as he appeared inclined to be communicative, I stopped and listened to his talk on the chance of gleaning something of the real life of a tramp. "It's a bit lonely at times," he confessed, "is tramping about country, but I love the free life. A tramp has nothing to lose, not even a character.

I should be perfectly happy if I'd a wife for a companion; then perhaps she would talk too much. You never know what a woman's like till you've married her, when it's too late." Then he dived his hand into his pocket and produced a crumpled cutting from some old newspaper, headed "A Tramp's Ideal Wife." "I tore that out of a London paper the other day," he said. "It's the opinion of a brother tramp about a wife; perhaps you'd like to see it." I was a little doubtful about handling the dirty newspaper scrap, but curiosity prevailed over my disinclination, and this is what I read: "A tramp in giving his opinions about a wife to our correspondent, states: 'She should be an all-round woman, not good-looking or she might run away with some one else, but she must be temperate. If there is any drinking to be done, I can see to that. She should be able to walk twenty miles a day, and be good at begging bottles and food. If she can sing a bit, so much the better, singing hymns or ballads brings coppers. She must not mind what people say, and she should be able to fight a round or two to defend her husband when in action.'"

As he chatted on, the tramp became quite confidential, he even confessed that he had never done a day's work in his life, and never intended to do it. He was a lazy scamp, but a civil one, and astonishingly candid. He owned that "the profession" was a bit overdone, "but things are not so good as they used to be in other walks of life." Though a tramp, he was manifestly a character, and his quaintness and civility earned him a sixpence, money

that doubtless might have been better expended, but it was not openly begged of me. My gift was received with dignified thanks, and the remark "it will be useful." I escaped, as I expected, the usual following blessing, for which omission I respected that tramp; who having carefully pocketed the coin, also put his crust aside, remarking, "Now I'll have a smoke. Have you such a thing as a match about you? My little stock is almost done, and a tramp has to be careful about trifles."

As I was about going on my way, a suspicion came over me that the munching of that crust was only a pretence, an ingenious and subtle method of begging, likely to appeal to the simple-minded and charitable passer-by. A glance at the crust as it lay on the grass bank confirmed my suspicions, for the crumb portion of it looked hard and dirty, as though it had not been in any way broken that day. For the moment I felt a little annoyed at having been so easily taken in, so much so that I even ventured boldly to reproach the tramp for having played a trick upon me. He calmly and coolly owned up to the fact without showing any sign of shame: "It's a dodge of the profession," he explained with a smile; "I always carries an old crust about with me and pulls it out of my pocket and pretends to gnaw it when I sees a likely party coming along. I saw your car, and I was expecting that perhaps you would pass my way. It pays a lot better than direct begging; begging is about played out, besides the police are so nasty about it, and you never know whom you are begging from. Once I

begged of a kind-looking old gentleman, and bless me if he wern't a magistrate, and I got into trouble over the job. A perfect fraud he were." Why that tramp chose to confide in me I cannot say, but he actually appeared to enjoy making his impudent confessions, for he smiled all the while, and puffed at his broken bit of black clay pipe, the very picture of idle contentment. A humorous scamp and a cunning actor. Why he chose that deserted road for his exploits puzzled me, but I did not feel inclined to discuss matters further; presumably he knew his business better than I, at any rate, so far, he had not been altogether unsuccessful thereon, and a proof of a good business locality is the takings thereof. That tramp, I feel assured, in spite of his statement, had a soul above a crust of bread and plain water.

Whilst on the subject of tramps I may here relate another experience of mine with one of the brotherhood. A certain evening I arrived at the inn of a country town, and whilst dismounting from the car was accosted by a weary-looking and dusty tramp who told me, and so artfully, such a tale of woe, that I felt I could not go into that comfortable hostelry and enjoy my meal leaving a starving fellow-being outside, for he declared he had not tasted food that day and was faint with hunger; and he had so miserable an appearance that I felt genuinely sorry for him, even to the extent of two shillings. I further felt a sense of having done a good deed, which, for a time, added to my happiness. Later on during the evening, when it was dark, I took a quiet stroll round the town, and to my utter

astonishment that very tramp again accosted me, manifestly not recognising who I was, divested of my motoring overcoat and goggles. He repeated his same old tale of woe in the same put-on pitiful and pleading voice that he had not tasted food that day, "nor has a soul in all this Christian land as much as given me a copper to buy a crust of bread with!" What I said to that sublimely impudent and mendacious tramp will not bear repeating here; and he actually had the audacity to beg my pardon, adding, "I had no idea as how you was the same party I spoke to before, it's the very first time as I've made such a mistake," and with that he coolly walked off. This is an unvarnished statement of what took place. Now I no longer weep over tramps, I leave that for foolish, though tender-hearted folk, to do. By my callousness I am robbed of many a blessing, but I have never found a tramp's blessing to bring any reward with it; for those who deem otherwise, it can generally be had for the small expenditure of twopence. According to my experience of the tribe, a penny merely produces thanks, but anything over that amount ensures a blessing; for sixpence not only have I secured a personal blessing, but one that extended to my whole family.

Leaving Ashburnham, we soon came into "a land of fragrance, quietness, and trees," for presently our road led us through the heart of a forest of pointed pines. With Belloc I might sing—

> I never get between the pines
> But I smell the Sussex air.

Now and again through their pillared recesses we caught long vistas, like the aisles of some fairy cathedral, barred with shafts of golden sunshine and long lines of blue-grey shadows. The air was filled with the pine trees' resinous odours quickened by the warm sunshine. Nowhere, I think, within the same distance of London can one find such glorious and wild forest scenery as beautifies the hills of Sussex, where the kindly southern climate gives an added wealth of colour to the woods. Here and there one stately tree uprose above the rest, and seemed fitted to be "the mast of some great Admiral," did only fighting ships of to-day need such masts.

Then, as we journeyed on, we left the woods behind and found ourselves in a sequestered country, wide and open to the sky—a wild and lonely upland very restful in its loneliness and silence and in the feeling of being far from anywhere. There are stretches of Sussex as wild and secluded as the traveller in search of solitude can desire, though it is a friendly and not the forbidding solitude of the rugged mountain. England is not yet all tamed and cultivated. It has been said that Thoreau found the freedom of the wilderness within the sound of Emerson's dinner-bell; we also often found the freedom of the wilderness within a stroll of our road when well away from towns. Solitude, to my mind, is most to be appreciated when you have a sympathetic companion by your side, though not a word be spoken, only a presence felt—and a motor ready to whisk you away before it becomes depressing. I enjoy my solitude best in silent company,

and, without wishing to disdain humanity, I prefer a dog to any other companion when in the wilderness. Lamb, gentle Lamb, had a positive hatred of wild nature. "Oh!" exclaimed he to a friend whilst tramping disconsolately one day over the desolate Cumberland fells, "Oh! for a glimpse of a human face and the grasp of a human hand." He knew not "the bliss of solitude" that meant so much to Wordsworth, and is so peace-bestowing to those who have been for over long in close and unsympathetic contact with the commonplace uninspired crowd.

In towns one has rarely any time to think or to call one's soul one's own, there are so many disturbing details; the wearying hum and strife of life is ever present and insistent. Only in the real country, remote from the busy hives of men, may one truly realise the thought that is within one. It is a tonic both for brain and body to be at times alone with the good, green earth and the silent sky above. More peaceful than the walled seclusion of the monastery are the green recesses of the woods and hills, where rural Pan and his friendly fellow-gods were wont to hide themselves in those far-off days when the world was blithe and young.

To quote Rousseau again: "I am," said he, "never so near heaven as when I am alone with Nature." And Rousseau was no religionist, being all his life at daggers drawn with dogma. These cheerful Sussex solitudes, with their illusions of remoteness, possess a wonderful power to charm and soothe the town-tired soul.

A genuine love of Nature lightens the troubled heart of man; but as Joquain Miller says, "You cannot come to love the beautiful in a day, or to understand Nature utterly after having forgotten her from your birth." Nature, like a modest maiden, is not to be won by a hasty glance; she needs a long and constant wooing. True and lasting love of her comes alone of knowledge; but once gained, it grows as certainly as grows a river flowing to the sea.

However, the English wayfarer cannot for long escape from man's handiwork; the marks and sounds of civilisation meet the eye and greet the ear at changeful intervals as he journeys on. So presently, on an elevated bit of rough grassy ground before us, we espied a tall, round pyramidical structure. This, from its isolated and prominent position, we took to be an important landmark, though, to our surprise, we could find no record of it on our Ordnance map. Then a countryman appeared approaching the car, the only human being we had set eyes upon since leaving Ashburnham, so forsaken are some parts of populous England. We asked him the purpose of the structure. It was a fortunate meeting, as without it we should have missed a bit of curious local history. "That," said he, "be Sugar-loaf House; it were built a long while back by the mad squire, but when he had built it he could get no one to live in it." "The mad squire!" we queried; "pray, who was he?" "Why," came in reply, "you must surely be a stranger hereabouts not to have heard of him. But them motor cars, of

course, travel far, and some come from foreign parts, to be sure." By "foreign parts" the Sussex native generally means another county, not another country; yet not always. I heard of a Heathfield labourer who removed himself and his family to another spot in Sussex some dozen miles away; however, he soon returned to his native place, giving as his reason that he was tired of "foreign parts." But our query as to who the mad squire was remained unanswered, so we repeated it. "Oh!" came in reply, "he were Jack Fuller as was. Honest Jack Fuller he called himself, but the folk about called him the mad squire. He's buried in Brightling Churchyard over there," pointing indefinitely into space. "When alive he built a big stone tomb for himself like one of them Egyptian pyramids, and he gave orders after his body was laid there that the key of the door of it should be destroyed, so that the devil could not get at him. He were a funny sort of man, he were, but a good sort all the same, they do say."

After our return home I hunted up the history of this eccentric Sussex squire, and discovered that he was elected M.P. for the county in 1807, and often caused roars of laughter in the House by his quaint speeches. Once he fell foul of the Speaker, whom he scornfully termed "an insignificant little man in a big wig." He had a mania for building, and amongst the many curious structures he caused to be erected, besides the quaint Sugar-loaf House, was a temple in his park, which he christened Solomon's Temple. To this he would retire at times "to meditate." He also caused a tall stone

A FREAK IN ARCHITECTURE: SUGAR-LOAF HOUSE.

obelisk to be raised on a point of high ground, so that it might be visible from far around and be a guide to his native village. But the most important building he erected was a large observatory in his grounds with a great glass dome. The interior of this was so planned as to be a vast camera obscura. Here the squire could watch the country around, the people at work in the fields, and, he said, he could count the deer in his park, the sheep grazing in the meadows, as well as the travellers on the roads. Still another of his whims was the building of a beacon tower, "to act as a guide for ships at sea." When he drove to London he armed himself with pistols, and his coachman and footman were likewise so armed, with the addition of swords, as a protection against highwaymen.

Truly a curious character. He instructed his executors to place his bust in Brightling Church, with the motto, UTILE NIHIL QUOD NON HONESTUM, and there it may be seen, motto and all, in a niche on the wall.

> O traveller, stop, for though his bones be rotten,
> Fuller rests here and must not be forgotten.

But in spite of his eccentricities Fuller was a man of genius and a liberal patron of the fine arts. He invited Turner to stay at Brightling, and commissioned him to paint several pictures of Sussex scenery. To this fortunate circumstance we owe the beautiful drawings of "The Vale of Heathfield," "Brightling from Rosehill," "View from Crowhurst," "Battle Abbey," "The Vale of Ashburnham," and

others. In these Turner's topography was more faithful to fact than usual, because probably the natural beauty of the country pleased and sufficed him, a fact that speaks well for the charms of Sussex scenery.

Topographic accuracy in drawing is scientific, not artistic. "Art," said Goethe, "is termed Art because it is not Nature"; and Turner was above all an artist. He painted poems, not places; to him the impression of a scene was the thing to strive for. He boldly confessed to having placed a town on the opposite side of a river to which it stood, "because it came better so." In his fine painting of Loch Awe he actually inserted an invented castle, as the ruins of Kilchurn existing there he did not consider rugged enough for the scene. In his view of Llanthony Abbey he was even more daring than his wont, for so greatly did he romance that he created almost everything; but he secured a wonderful picture. In truth, the scene is Italian rather than Welsh. It has sometimes occurred to me that possibly this drawing, by some mischance, has been wrongly entitled, and it is really of a foreign ruin. I can hardly imagine that even Turner would have romanced so unblushingly.

For one act of his "honest Jack Fuller" deserves to be gratefully remembered by all good Englishmen who treasure, as a priceless heritage, the old historic buildings of their motherland. Fuller, hearing one day that the unique and beautiful ruins of Bodiam Castle were in serious danger of demolition, promptly purchased them at a price above their

presumed market value, solely to preserve the venerable pile. If he had done naught else than this, his name should "not be forgotten." Though less known than many more famous feudal strongholds, Bodiam, standing remote amongst the wooded hills of Sussex and rising picturesquely out of its wide and lake-like moat, is of exceptional interest, as its external walls and towers are almost perfect, so that one can readily realise from a glance at them what a medieval castle looked like when in its prime. Seeing the actuality quickens the imagination more than any description, poem, or picture can.

Soon after leaving the Sugar-loaf House we came to the remote little village of Dallington, perched on the top of a high hill; a village that has never heard the sound of a railway whistle, and where, I should imagine, a stranger never appears unless he has lost his way. Truly, we had not lost our way, for the good reason we had no way to lose. There is positively nothing in Dallington to attract the tourist, apart from the wide views it commands over the country around, with a glimpse of the distant sea beyond. It is a sleepy, uneventful hamlet, windswept and clean, consisting of a few small houses clustered around its ancient church; pleasing in its naturalness, primitive without being picturesque, though boasting of one old half-timber cottage that might have stepped out of a picture by Mrs. Allingham or Birket Foster.

Graven on a weather-worn stone high up in the church tower we noticed the quaint device of the

Pelham buckle; and therein lies a bit of hidden history. During former wanderings in Sussex I had frequently come upon this noticeable device prominently displayed on various buildings, and was puzzled as to its significance. Eventually, however, I discovered that it was the badge of that valiant knight Sir John Pelham, who made prisoner the King of France at the battle of Poictiers, the badge being intended to represent the sword-belt buckle of the captured king. After which event, on any church he founded or aided in the building, or on any house he erected, and even on a wayside bridge here and there, this Sir John Pelham caused his badge to be engraved. He was a brave warrior, therefore this little weakness of his may perhaps be pardoned, for it was an age when men gloried to proclaim their doughty deeds, and you must judge a man by the age in which he lived. So sculptured stones have oftentimes a tale to tell.

Many a quaint bit of carving on an old building has aroused my curiosity, and caused me to make inquiries as to its hidden meaning. By so doing, I have frequently unearthed some interesting detail of long-forgotten history, or perchance an ancient family tradition, or some strange superstition of past days. Many curious bits of carving and perplexing inscriptions greet the wayfarer's observant eye, their purport lost in the mists of antiquity, only to be recovered by much diligent research, and not always then. Of these the Pelham buckle is an interesting example.

For the unlettered folk of the period symbols or

stories carved in stone were their only reading. Nor was this reading always serious, for the jovial monks of old joked in stone or made merry in wood so pointedly that their intent was, and is, manifest to the dullest observer. I fancy those medieval monks loved a joke better than a sermon. Time has not lessened the meaning or the mirthfulness of their ancient jests, for they are ever fresh ; their comicalities live and force a smile even when the heart is sad.

Dallington will always be pleasantly remembered by us on account of the glorious view we enjoyed, southward, from its elevated churchyard—a view striking in its rolling extent and changeful outline of wooded hill and rounded down ; a prospect varied and vast, bounded to the extreme right by the bold promontory of Beachy Head, and to the left by the heights beyond Hastings, with a long stretch of silvery sea between. How space-expressing it was to look over those leagues of green landscape fading into the blue sea, and the sea in turn fading into the bluer sky. I know no finer view in all Sussex, that land of scenic revelations. It seems strange to me how little the rural beauties of this sunny southern county are known or appreciated ; possibly because they mostly lie—the best of them, that is—out of the beaten track, and are reached by roads that lead to nowhere in particular ; and possibly because there is nothing sensational or exciting about them, nothing that would appeal to the average tourist.

Sussex scenery too frequently lacks the enliven-

ing presence of water; but here was water galore, for we had the spacious sea. Sussex, beyond railways, with its wooded hills, its heather-clad heights, its breezy gorse-clad wastes, its dreamy valleys, and the "green goodness" of its wide Weald, what a homelike, lovable land it is! How little they know of Sussex who only know its fringe of fashionable seaside resorts—the sea-coast vulgarised.

Dallington, isolated amongst the hills, world-forgetting and world-unknown, is as drowsy as a village may be; and therein lies its charm, though probably the Philistine would declare it to be a desolation of dulness. A village where nothing special ever seems to happen, and possibly never has happened; how could it, set high and dry as it is out of the march of man? I should imagine the only activity it knows, or has known during the long centuries past, is the gathering together of its worshippers on Sundays—a happy relief from the monotony of week-days, though the country folk dressed in their solemn best never seem quite at ease, and certainly lack the pleasing picturesqueness of their workaday clothes. Why, I wonder, should the odour of sanctity be so associated with dismal black apparel?

It is good at times to escape from towns, and to come to such a quiet spot as Dallington, where the wheels of Time seem slowed, and a past tranquillity, so rare to find in this striving modern day, reigns undisturbed; where, moreover, the worrying outer world, that is in such constant touch with us, appears so far removed to the senses, if not in

measured miles. Remoteness is a quality that depends not on mere distance. Such spots make peaceful memories—memories that may be recalled with a feeling of deep refreshment when amidst and weary of the busy city's ceaseless toil and traffic.

Stevenson says: "It is an odd thing how happily two people can live in a place where they have no acquaintance." And Dallington appears to me eminently suitable for such a retired existence of two, "where they could just see so much of humanity as to keep them from a desire of seeing more." Yet to some, prolonged quiet but breeds unquietness. I should like to buy that view from the churchyard at Dallington, and take it to my home to enjoy at my leisure! I have travelled by road for many hundreds of miles without seeing anything fairer or finer.

CHAPTER III

A hilly road—"What's in a name?"—A moated church—Two fine brasses of knights in armour—The sentimental traveller—A rector 101 years of age—A crested helmet—A curious legend—A buried statue—An old coaching hostelry—Taking "mine ease at mine inn"—The fascination of bowls.

LEAVING Dallington to its peaceful seclusion, we drove on, not knowing where we were going. The open road before us would lead to somewhere, and that somewhere we left to Fate. We trusted a good deal to Fate, for, as I have before remarked, it saved us the trouble of unfolding maps, consulting sign-posts, road-books, or discussing routes, and I hate discussions. You may even quarrel with your best friend over so trivial a matter as where to go next, and the best way of getting there. I travel purely for the pleasure of travel, and care not a whit about direction or destination. In the journey I joy.

> All I ask, the heaven above
> And the road below me.

Before us lay a wild tumble of green hills, here rising strongly profiled against the sunny sky, there dipping down into dim and shady valleys—hills that were fir-fringed for far along their windy summits. On those open heights the pointed tops

of the tall pines were tossing and bending before the breeze, giving a feeling of movement and life to the prospect where no other movement or life was visible. The wind too made a mighty harp of the forest trees; now wild and loud were the tunes it played, now soft and low like the soothing chant of the summer sea; tunes as old as the hills themselves, old yet ever new.

It was an inviting road that promised good things ahead, and did not belie its promise. We could trace it winding away and away till it narrowed into nothingness and melted into the distant blue, a distance to the vision as unsubstantial as a cloud. A land of mystery that stimulated our imaginations; there surely we might discover our long-sought-for Arcadia. It was a land of possibilities, moreover; as Montaigne says, "a powerful imagination produces anything"—yet a land we never reached, for the horizon is ever remote and never can be won, as fast as you approach it, so fast does it recede.

It proved to be a hilly drive, bracing in its breeziness and inspiriting in its wide prospects over hill and vale and forest; our progress was a succession of ups and downs, with little of level between. The day was hot, the hills were steep, but as the motor did the climbing, we happily did not mind the hills; we travelled by petrol instead of by oats, by piston instead of by muscle, so our joy of the scenery was not marred by the straining of horse-flesh; and to a considerate traveller this is a strong point in favour of the motor. How can any right-minded man properly enjoy good scenery if he

suspects he is punishing his horses. "I hate a machine, it has no feelings," said a friend to me one day, referring to my car. Now that is the very thing about a motor that I prize, it never tires, and needs no urging of the whip; and what is more depressing than driving exhausted horses?

Eventually we came to a long descent, at the foot of which we found ourselves in a small village, clean and neat, with gently sloping wooded hills around, and a tiny river meandering by. The river Rother we discovered this to be. Keeping faithful watch and ward over the village (Etchingham by name) stood a venerable square-towered church; a church bold yet simple in outline, beautiful in the soft grey tint of its stones, original in conception, all of one period, and interesting in detail. Its massive tower has a stair turret, and is surmounted by a pyramidal roof of red tiles weathered almost into grey; the roof in turn is topped by an ancient vane of quaint device, the device being that of a banner pierced so as to show the arms of the Echinghams, Sir William de Echingham having built, or rather rebuilt, the church in the reign of Edward III. A fairly long time ago. This detail we learned afterwards from the rector, whom we chanced to meet. The vane is of copper and the original one of the fourteenth century; it has outlived much history, and in spite of its age it was turning friskily about on its windy elevation when we were there—"Les girouettes qui sont placées le plus haut tournent le mieux," says an old French proverb.

Etchingham, that has changed its early spelling

from Echingham (no great alteration, yet no improvement it seems to me), is a name that suggested romance to my mind, though why, it would be hard to say, possibly it was merely that it had an uncommon sound. "What's in a name?" I am inclined to think there is a good deal in one that is quaint, poetic, unusual, or pleasant-sounding. Names go for something in this world.

So fine a church as this of Etchingham, thought I, most probably enshrines some stately memorials of the brave warriors of old, perchance the effigy of a gallant knight in full armour recumbent on his marble monument, or his pictured brass upon the floor; possibly also some oak cunningly carved by the medieval craftsman; or, it might be, some rare old stained glass that gleams like melted jewels in the sunshine through the traceried windows shed. My expectations ran high, for, in so small and poor a village, a likely lack of pence might happily have averted the ruthless hand of the restorer fiend, allowing only necessary repairs to be done. In such a case I could heartily exclaim, "Blessed is poverty." So many and grievous are the sins committed in the name of restoration, that I detest the very term, detest it as zealously as any Puritan detested Popery, or Saint Dunstan the Devil, whichever be the greater, and this is saying much. To repair when needful and simply to honestly maintain a building, fraught it may be with the hoary antiquity of centuries, is a necessary and a laudable proceeding, for no one desires a precious relic of the never-returning past to fall into hopeless

ruin. To do more than this is to commit needless desecration.

Etchingham church did not wholly disappoint, nor yet did it wholly satisfy us. "Fortune," however, "seldom comes with both hands full," and if we were mildly disappointed at the first glance within, it was because the exterior promise of the sacred edifice—stately, impressive, age-dimmed and weather-worn, yet with small signs of actual decay or restoration—unduly raised our expectations. In truth, Etchingham church is one of great antiquarian and archaeological interest, possessing many unique features to add to its charm of ancientness.

On a nearer approach to the building we were surprised to discover that it was originally moated. The moat, though now drained dry except at one spot, can still be clearly traced, and encloses a considerable space of ground. The reason of this strange addition to a peaceful place of worship is not easy to understand. We conjectured that possibly the moat was constructed as a protection from robber bands that infested the country; though why Etchingham church should especially have needed this protection beyond others around it is hard to say. However, Michelham Priory in the same county is still surrounded by a moat, water-filled to this day; but Michelham Priory is near to the sea, and the bold French rovers, caring nothing for God or man, at times raided the coast, burning both churches and towns as in the cases of Rye and Winchelsea. Still, they seldom ventured far inland, and Etchingham is well inland.

The interior of the church, as I have already remarked, seems somewhat bare, though not painfully so, as though it had suffered loss of decorative enrichment at one period, possibly during the Reformation days. The chancel is of unusual length, and the nave of unusual height, which together give a distinctive character to the building; manifestly, for good or ill, and I think for good, the ancient architect was a man of original ideas and no mere copyist, and a little originality, so long as it be artistic, kept well in bounds, and not freakish, what a relief it is from the monotony of slavish uniformity! The building shows thought in every corner, its stones have a story to tell, and they tell it. There is no apparent striving after effect, yet the effect is there. The architect is, I believe, unknown; he built to the glory of God and not for his own renown.

On the floor leading up to the erst high altar lay a long strip of matting, which we promptly removed in the hope of a "find," for this was considered especially holy ground in days of old; it was the coveted place of burial of the great and the noble, being, however, first generally reserved for the pious founder of the church. I say pious advisedly, though I have my serious doubts on the matter, for to compound for an evil life, when that life was near its ending, many a rascally baron and knight founded a church; thus he secured priestly absolution for his misdeeds, and purchased peace and "perpetual prayers" for his soul. So both church and sinner profited. How the poorer transgressor

managed I know not; I trust his soul has not suffered for his poverty. The "perpetual prayers" have ceased long ago, so in this respect both sinners are now on an equality.

Beneath the matting we discovered two large and fine brasses with their inscriptions intact; the brass nearest the altar is unfortunately mutilated, the head being missing, otherwise the figure is undamaged. The other, an equally beautiful brass, with the exception of some escutcheons that have disappeared from the side, is happily perfect. The former brass represents a knight in full armour, complete to the detail of the spurs on his sollerets; the hands are crossed in the attitude of devotion, and at his feet is the usual faithful lion couchant. This brass is that of the rebuilder of the church, according to a Latin inscription that runs round the top of it, just over where the head should be. "Iste Willms fecit ista eccliam de novo reedificari in honore Dei et Assupcois Beate Marie et Sci Nichi." So runs the legend. Below the figure are the following lines in delightfully quaint Norman-French, the language of the court and of the lords of the land at that time:—

De terre fu fet et fourme,
Et en terre fu retourne:
William de Echinghm estoie nome,
Dieu de malme eiez pitee:
Et vous qi par ici passez
Pur lame de moy pur Dieu priez:
Qi de Januere le xviij jo
De cy passai lan nre Seignour,
Mill trois centz quat vintz oept,
Come Dieu volait ento my noet.

This Norman-French, even when cut, as usual, in old Gothic letters, is easier to read—to me at least—than the archaic English of a later period, or the learned Latin that preceded it, with its many arbitrary abbreviations,—words, indeed, being not infrequently reduced to mere letters, as, for instance, "C. a. p. D. A." for "Cujus anime propitietur Deus. Amen." One has often to guess what these contractions mean, with all the uncertainty of guessing. In the Norman-French these contractions are limited and follow an established rule, so they are not unduly perplexing.

With respect to the brass of William de Echingham, it is curious that the two inscriptions, one at the head and the other at the foot, should be respectively in Latin and Norman-French, for which peculiarity I can suggest no explanation. The lettering of these inscriptions is as legible as when first cut, over five eventful centuries ago, so that we had no difficulty in deciphering the words.

There is no memorial to the dead so lasting as an ancient brass, for it is so hard that you can scarcely scratch it with a knife, but the art of making these enduring brasses is a lost one. Modern brasses, when employed, are poor affairs; easily marked, they too soon tarnish and become dull when placed on a wall, as they often are, and worn if on the floor, which is the proper position for a brass, as, when of hard metal, the tread of feet but serves to keep it bright and polished. The engraving of a modern brass is, moreover, depressingly mean, wanting in vigour, lastingness, and character. On the other

hand, the brasses of the thirteenth and fourteenth century—and even to a somewhat later, but uncertain period—were true works of art; they were boldly and beautifully engraved, the lines were deeply cut, yet free, and this in spite of the exceeding hardness of the metal; the plates, too, were thick and strong.

The next fine brass, adjoining that of William de Echingham and just to the west of it, shows two knights in plate armour, with a lady in a quaint head-dress (probably of the then latest fashion) between, and at her feet a dog. Above each figure is a fine canopy. This brass, according to the inscription in Latin thereon (inconsistently done in Gothic letters), commemorates the son of the rebuilder of the church—in his turn the Lord of Echingham—his wife, and heir.

Standing there in the church's solemn gloom, as we looked down on the ancient memorials of the noble dead, their bodies now but dust below, the gap of centuries was for the time being bridged over, and the past seemed a reality and the present but a dream. How simple were the inscriptions; there was no vain boasting about them, so the more they appealed to me. The hoary walls of the ancient fane seemed to enclose a veritable atmosphere of bygone days. I feel I can worship infinitely better in such a time-hallowed church, sanctified by the frequently repeated prayers and sacred ritual of our forefathers, their monuments and brasses around to remind me what manner of men they were, than in a modern one that has its memories to make.

So much for sentiment. I cannot wholly agree with Carlyle that "The barrenest of mortals is the sentimentalist."

In the chancel still stand the original stalls of oak, delicately and beautifully carved; also on the floor are many of the original encaustic tiles, apparently undisturbed since they were first placed there. These are graceful in pattern, and soft in colour—how much, if any, of the latter pleasing quality may be due to age, I cannot say. Some modern tiles are laid alongside, copies of the old, yet they do not contrast favourably with them. However faithfully we endeavour to copy the work of the past, the spirit of it evades us. Possibly the secret is that our work is more or less a task; to the medieval craftsman it was a joy.

The fine east window is flamboyant, graceful in its tracery, showing a tendency to foreign design, yet, I imagine, no mere copy. A style of window rare in England, according to my experience. It strikes me as quite likely that Sir William de Echingham may have been one of the valiant knights who served under Edward III. during the French wars, and that he may have taken the idea for the window when there. This is, of course, pure conjecture, but, if correct, it would account for the introduction of such an un-English feature in an otherwise purely English church; yet so thoughtfully has the work been carried out, that the harmony of the whole is complete. The two east windows of the nave are also of unique design—original without being eccentric.

On the south wall of the chancel we noticed a modern brass with a Latin inscription recording the fact that the church had again been re-edified by Hugo Totty, Rector, "Anno Salutis MCCCLXVI. Aetatis suae CI." Truly a good old age. Etchingham appears to be a place where people "last," as an inhabitant remarked to me. In confirmation of this I noticed on a tombstone in the churchyard an inscription to a parishioner "Who died May 17th, 1900. Aged 100 years." His wife, too, reached the flourishing age of eighty-six. You may judge, to some extent at least, of the healthiness of a place by studying the tombstones of its deceased inhabitants.

As we were leaving the church we noticed on the wall of the south aisle, hanging on a bracket, the helmet with crest attached and pennon dependent of "Sir George Strode, a knight of Kent," who once held an estate at Etchingham. Presumably he is buried in the nave, but if so, his tomb or brass we failed to find; still, where a warrior's armour is, near by should his body rest; this is only customary and fitting.

> The knight's bones are dust,
> And his good sword rust:
> His soul is with the saints, I trust.

It delighted me to gaze on that bit of old armour hanging there, for it was mutely eloquent, a poem without words. Once it was worn by a brave knight; for it is an article of faith with me that all the knights of the ancient days were brave and bold, and loved an honest fight. Time casts a halo of romance over the past; we need not inquire too

closely into that misty era,—in that way lies possible disillusion. Let the romance remain! The age of chivalry is gone, but it makes a delightful memory. Sometimes it is pleasanter to look backward than to look forward. The present will one day be the past: will our descendants, I wonder, call it the picturesque past? Will Time so favour us?

There were other brasses and some mural monuments of interest, and further features worthy of note in the time-worn fane, but space merely permits me to make mention of their existence. We had, for a time, been transported back long centuries; but coming suddenly from out of the medieval gloom of the church into the bright sunlight and to our modern car, effectually brought our day-dreaming to an end.

As we were about to mount the car we observed a grey-bearded clergyman walking towards us down the quiet village street, and I ventured to accost him, guessing he was the rector. As an excuse to open up a conversation, I asked him if the church were not originally moated, though the fact was self-evident. "Yes," he replied, "you have surmised aright. The church was built by Sir William de Echingham in the fourteenth century, and the moat enclosed both the church and his castle. It is a most interesting old church; I love it as though it were my own child; I love every stone of it." Here was a parson after my own heart, one whom I rejoiced to meet, and to chat with. It was a kind attention of Fate to bring us together, though for a brief moment; for the parson had but little

time to spare that day. "If you can manage to come back here to-morrow," said he, "I shall be only too delighted to show you over the church and to explain everything about it at leisure." Alas! our antiquarian zeal did not go so far as to accept this kind and much appreciated offer. We were on a journey, and were we to dally thus at every interesting spot we came to, winter would be on us long before our journey was accomplished.

"There is a curious legend about the moat that I must find time to tell you," exclaimed the rector. "A big bell is said to have been sunk in the moat that would never be recovered till six yoke of pure white oxen were brought to the spot to drag it out. Long years ago, when the moat was full of water, the villagers declared that at times they could hear the bell ringing with a muffled sound." I do love these ancient legends that the traveller, in old lands, so frequently comes upon, if only he takes the trouble to put himself in the way of hearing them. How did they originate, I wonder? Some one must have started them; and in the credulous days gone by, once fairly started, a legend was sure of acceptance, and the monks encouraged them. The legend of the Etchingham bell has a strong resemblance to those more familiar ones of Bosham, near Chichester, and of Bottreaux in Cornwall. All have, possibly, a common origin, and suggest, to me, a Scandinavian source.

"Now I'm going to give you a bit of authentic history," continued the rector. "A number of years ago a large and very beautifully carved oak

statue, gilt and coloured, of the Madonna was dug up in the churchyard. It was in excellent condition, being carefully wrapped up in some material to preserve it. No one knew anything about it; possibly it was buried there to escape the Puritan fury, or it might have been at an earlier period. After it had been recovered, it mysteriously disappeared, possibly quietly sold to some collector," and the rector shrugged his shoulders as though he could say more, but did not care to do so. Then he proceeded: "You probably noticed the various coats-of-arms represented in the stained glass of the east window; you may like to know to whom they belonged. The left-hand one is that of the Duke of Brittany, the next that of Edward III., the next again that of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and the last that of Edward the Black Prince." Our informant now glanced uneasily at his watch and exclaimed, "I'm so sorry, but I really must go now. If I had only met you an hour ago, I could have told you so much more. Good-bye." So we parted each to go his own way. "To meet, to greet, to bid farewell," such is the lot of the wayfarer. Our meetings on the road were often brief enough when the people we met were interesting, yet better so than never to have met them at all. Etchingham church is more than a mere building; it is a history in stone.

Proceeding on our way, we ascended out of the valley by a winding road deep in the shade of overhanging woods, which gave place to an open country of green fields on which the sun shone warmly

down, and soon we found ourselves in the straggling village of Hurst Green, where there is nothing of interest to detain the traveller; at least if there be, we successfully failed to discover it.

At Hurst Green we came upon the main London and Hastings road, for long after the railway traversed the district an almost deserted road, but now much frequented by motor cars, and as much alive as it was in the old coaching days. Who would have imagined, twenty years ago, this wonderful resurrection of the road? Not caring for so much company, to say nothing of the dust, we turned down the first lane we came to; the lane was narrow, but it made pleasant wandering, and we had it all to ourselves. Ever and again, as we drove on we caught delightful glimpses, over the hedges and through the trees, of the Kentish hills that faded away into a blue mist. A smiling landscape, soft of outline, and mellow.

Our lane wound about a good deal, as though it could not make up its mind as to its destination, but eventually, after a stiff climb, it landed us at Hawkhurst, a pleasant little village open to the sunshine and all the winds that blow. At the end of the village, almost hidden by trees that stood in front of it, stood a restful-looking old coaching inn —a long, low, creeper-covered building of no architectural merit, yet it had a look of homeliness and pleasantness. An inn set well back from the road, with a little garden in front of it, and, as we afterwards discovered, a large and shady garden behind, where was an old-fashioned bowling-green. An inn

that we first took to be a private house, and had it not been for its modest signboard we should have passed it unregarded by. I was glad we noticed it.

I am a bit exacting in the choice of my quarters for the night, and a motor car makes one delightfully independent in this matter. I infinitely prefer a country hostelry to a town hotel, and at the former one may frequently find a pleasant garden attached. I have always a keen eye for an inn with a garden, and the more homely the inn the better it pleases me, so long as it be clean and mine host obliging. Luxury I do not crave; simple, wholesome fare, civility, and comfort, are the things I seek, and seldom seek in vain. "Shall I not take mine ease at mine inn?" Now, at a modern luxurious hotel I never feel quite at mine ease—the stony-eyed manager and head waiter repel me; to the latter I only represent so much in tips, and I resent losing my individuality in a mere number. When I sit down to table in such establishments, the first thing the waiter generally demands of me is my number; my name I can remember, but my number I always forget; it changes with every hotel.

Give me the friendly country inn, old-fashioned and unimproved; it was good enough for my ancestors, it is good enough for me. An inn where the landlord himself welcomes you and takes a personal interest in your welfare as long as you are under his roof, where a motherly landlady busies herself to look after your comforts, and a be-ribboned maid waits quietly upon you. It is all so restful, and there you feel really at home away from home. An

old-time inn where the landlord will indulge you with pleasant gossip over a postprandial pipe in his cosy bar, where, too, you may meet the villagers and learn their views of life and how the world serves them. It is a poor listener who cannot find entertainment, and even information, in such varied company. Most old coaching inns, besides, have their traditions, and these well repay the time devoted to hearing their relation. Traditions cling to these old coaching inns as surely as ivy clings to an old ruin, and, like old wine, they improve with age. I like my wine and my traditions mellow.

The day was not ended; long though we had tarried on the way, we could easily have made another stage—indeed, the weather tempted us to do so; on the other hand, the comfortable-looking inn tempted us to stop where we were for the night, and the inn prevailed. "We might go farther and fare worse," exclaimed my wife; "and why should we go on when we have no idea of where we are going to? This is a pleasure tour; we are not bound to do so many miles a day. It is just the sort of an inn to make me wish we were benighted and compelled to stop at it." I mildly retorted that I had no desire to go farther. "He is a fool who leaves certainties for uncertainties," wrote Hesiod over two thousand years ago, and a truth is a truth for all time.

On entering the inn we found ourselves in a little hall hung round about with ancient weapons and other curiosities that included some sea relics fished up from the deep, not to forget an old iron muni-

ment chest, clamped round with bands of iron, a chest that might have come out of the Armada, though probably it was some family treasure safe—a medieval Chubb. These things made a pleasant greeting to the eye; first impressions count for much; our inn was to our liking. We sought merely for comfort, we had a touch of romance thrown in. Later on, in the long, low-ceilinged coffee-room, we found more curiosities ranged round its walls, including old carved oak and hammered brass work, with other odds and ends, all of which interested the eye and gave the mind something to think about. Most of these things were made "by hammer and hand," and by chisel besides, some rudely, some cleverly; and things fashioned by hand are the beginning of all true art, for they are individual and anti-mechanical.

During the evening we strolled into the bowling-green and watched a game of bowls being played by the villagers with as much earnestness as though the fate of the empire depended upon the result. When I come to think of it, bowls is a serious game, not lightly to be interfered with; for did not Drake when playing a rubber of bowls on Plymouth Hoe decline to be disturbed, though he was told the Armada was in sight. "They must wait their turn, good souls," said he, and he stopped to finish the game. So we looked on in silence till the game was done, and only then we got a-chatting with the village folk. Such an occasion is the opportunity of the wayfarer to pick up odd bits of local lore, wise sayings, and unfamiliar proverbs, for country

folk often interlard their talk with such things, and sometimes let fall a gem, or state an old truth in a quaint way, giving it the charm of piquancy. But the conversation we had that evening proved commonplace and tedious, neither amusing nor enlightening.

CHAPTER IV

A conceit in milestones—Northiam—A story of Queen Elizabeth—Brede manor-house—How traditions are started—A knightly ogre—A legend of Udimore—The rare old town of Rye—The twin maids of Biddenden—Sissinghurst Castle—A gruesome relation—Cranbrook church and its "dipping-place"—The Sussex moonrakers—Goudhurst—The wonderful caves of Chislehurst—The bones of a monster—Orpington.

LEAVING our hotel, we took the road that went by it; there was no other road to take unless we retraced our way of yesterday, which we were not minded to do. It proved to be a pleasant road, and this for the moment sufficed us; where it might lead was a matter we did not trouble about. However, we had not gone far when we observed a milestone with "Rye, 16 miles" thereon. It was a treat to come upon a respectable milestone again, the lettering on it plainly decipherable, for milestones are growing scarce in the land; in fact, this was the first we had noticed on the journey. For one, I regret the passing of the milestone, that silent companion of the lonely wayfarer. The resurrection of the road being a fact and not a vain imagining, the old useful milestones may possibly be resurrected again; not only are they useful to tell the distance by, but in a

measure they serve the purpose of a sign-post. Writing of milestones reminds me that I observed a pretty conceit on one near Uckfield in Sussex. The milestone was of iron, but this is a detail; cast on it was the representation of a ribbon tied in a bow from which hung three bells, with the miles given in figures below. A poetic way of showing the distance to Bow Bells in London. This reminds me that "the big Bell of Bow" was cast in Sussex by that famous bell-founder Richard Phelps, who also cast the tenors of Westminster Abbey and Winchester Cathedral. One thing suggests another, and that is, according to Stow, Bow Church was so called because it was the first London church built upon bows or arches.

"We may as well go to Rye as anywhere else," I remarked. "Rye is a quaint old town well worth seeing, from all I have heard and read about it. To Rye let us go." When I came to think the matter over, it reproached me that I had never been to that ancient and historic cinque port; by happy chance, that day I would remove that reproach from my mind. Not to know Rye is to confess oneself unacquainted with perhaps the most charming old-world town in all fair England. Now that the road had declared its destination, to that destination we drove contentedly along. We could not have planned a better stage, or one more to our satisfaction, and though our wanderings were without method, I doubt if any method would have served us as well. Deliberate travel is not so fruitful of pleasant surprises, and these are the

main joys of a journey taken in search of holiday relaxation.

We passed through one or two little villages, agreeable enough, but not specially attractive, then we dipped down to the toy Rother river; I should have deemed it a wide stream, but our map marked it as a river,—after which we crossed a single-line railway, its grass-grown track suggesting but little travel thereon and a sparsely inhabited country. On consulting our map again we found this to be the "Rother Valley Railway." It passes by Bodiam Castle, where one day I spent two good honest hours sketching the ruins, yet I never heard, or saw, a train go by. Quite a harmless little line considered as a scenic spoiler or a noise disturber of the quiet countryside.

After this we came to Northiam, a large and pleasant village with some rare old cottages around, where the good old-fashioned ingle-nooks are to be found with ample hearths for the burning of wood, if you are fortunate enough to obtain a glance at their picturesque interiors. How mean they make the cramped modern builder's cottage seem! Northiam is not without its historic episode, for Queen Elizabeth, during one of her many progresses (on this occasion it was to Rye she was journeying), rested and dined there beneath a great oak that stood on the village green. The remains of this ancient tree are still to be seen, and are pointed out with pride by the village folk. It is recorded that at the time the grass was damp, and that Queen Bess therefore took off her wet shoes

and put on dry ones. The discarded shoes of satin with high heels are still preserved in a neighbouring house, we were told.

At Northiam we somehow got off the direct road to Rye, and soon found ourselves on a narrow and somewhat hilly by-way, a fact we did not regret, as it took us into the heart of a pretty and little travelled district, and gave us a sight of some delightfully picturesque old half-timber homes. One of these, the "Well House," with its thatched roof and clipped yew trees in front, made a charming picture,—a carefully preserved specimen of a prosperous yeoman's dwelling of about the sixteenth century; and we found others even more picturesque and quite as old. Of one of these ancient homes I give an illustration that I trust may serve to reveal something of their pleasantness, in spite of the absence of the wealth of tints with which Time has endowed their walls and roofs. Only a water-colour drawing could hope to do them justice. These old houses, within as well as without, are homes; when you look at them, that is the one thing above all others you feel,—domesticity is their keynote. Each house has its own individuality, it owes its picturesque existence to no skilled architect; it was built by local craftsmen of local material, making the best of the material nearest to hand—and it was built to live in. No one house resembles another, each have their distinctive character; and how delightful a thing character is, whether in man or house. The ancient yeoman built his home to suit his requirements; in it he has, to a certain extent,

A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY HALF-TIMBER FARM-HOUSE.

expressed himself, so that we may roughly guess what manner of man he was, allowing for the times in which he lived. As Thoreau pertinently puts it, "There is some of the same fitness in a man building his own house that there is in a bird building its own nest."

Then, after many ups and downs and along crooked ways not over good, yet not, as Horace Walpole called the by-roads of Sussex, "bad beyond all badness," we reached the hamlet of Brede, close to which stands the very charming little manor-house of Brede Place, built in the fifteenth century, and for long the abode of the Oxenbridges, a notable Sussex family of those days. The house is of stone and has Tudor doorways and windows; its roof is much broken in outline, and its chimneys are many. The house is an architectural gem. Coventry Patmore when alive sent me a description he had written of it. "Brede Place," said he, "is the finest small house of its date (Henry VII.) I have ever seen"; and a poet ought to be a good judge of what a beautiful building is. Then he adds, "A well-known architect who saw it for the first time in my company spoke of it as a 'lyric in architecture.'" An amusing incident of one of his visits there let me relate in Patmore's own words: "The ceilings of the house are bracketed by the biggest beams of oak I ever saw. Some cannot be less than fourteen or sixteen inches square. As I was once going through the house with some friends, I pointed to one of these beams, having a great iron hook in it, and said, in the presence of

the woman who was in charge of the place, 'Look where the old lord used to hang his vassals.' Two or three years afterwards I went there again, and the custodian having forgotten me, showed the beam to the party, repeating my own words as authentic history; and I am told that the place is never shown now without the relation of this tradition." So much for the reliability of guides; certain old houses demand a story, and no guide to one whom I have ever met has failed to supply me with the needful article. Sometimes he, or she, has a story with every room; often gruesome relations they are too, probably wholly untrue. Still, I must own a weakness to hearing them, if the house has any sense of mystery about it. Certain dimly lighted, dark, oak-panelled chambers suggest a foul murder, or at least a conspiracy; others demand a ghost; others call aloud for the past presence of Queen Elizabeth, or Charles I., or Cromwell; you cannot escape the atmosphere of the place—the feeling that some startling event has taken place within them, whereupon you fall an easy prey to the mendacious guide.

Brede Place has its traditions apart from the one provided by Patmore. Sir Goddard Oxenbridge, who lived there, and died there in 1531, and is buried in Brede church, where his effigy in knight's armour rests on his stately tomb, is said to have been a veritable ogre who fed upon the steaks of children. Many attempts were made to slay him, but in vain, till one day two men discovered him helpless on the ground after a drinking bout, and

forthwith cut him in half with a saw, the only instrument they had with them. During the process the wicked knight naturally groaned dreadfully. The spot where this tragedy happened was by a bridge in a lane that goes to-day by the name of Groaning Bridge. This bridge is pointed out by the worthy Brede folk in truth of the tradition. But this Sir Goddard Oxenbridge does not appear to have been the only Sussex knight who fed on children, for Sir Thomas Lunsford of East Hoathly was reported to have had similar cannibal tastes, according to a mock litany of the period :

> From Fielding and from Vavasour,
> Both ill-affected men ;
> From Lunsford eke deliver us,
> Who eateth children.

Soon after leaving Brede we passed by Udimore, a little hamlet formerly, it is said, washed by the sea ; now the sea is about two miles away across the dreary marshes, for on this portion of the coast the sea has been receding ever since the days of Elizabeth. Horsfield asserts that the name of the place is derived from Eau-de-mer. Tradition, that unreliable jade, has a different and more picturesque version of its origin, according to which, when the inhabitants were about to build the first church there, they selected a site by the side of the mere, but the stones placed on the spot during the daytime in readiness for the work, every next morning were found to have been mysteriously removed to the other side of the water. As this went on for some time, the parishioners determined to sit up

and watch who it was that did this strange thing. Then, in an age of marvels, the parishioners beheld a company of angels, who took the stones and conveyed them carefully across the water, exclaiming, "Over the mere." So the watchers realised that they had selected the wrong site for their church, and forthwith erected it on the ground where the angels had laid the stones. Thus "Over the mere" became in time corrupted into Udimore. A wild legend, but not too wild for the age. A legend that suggests to me a Scandinavian origin: it is one, with variations, frequently to be met with in the eastern part of England, only it is sometimes the devil who moves the stones, to stop, if possible, the building of a church. At East Bergholt, in Suffolk, his Satanic majesty is credited with having pulled down all the upper part of the tower as fast as it was raised, and that is why it was never finished. I suggested to a native that it was possibly a want of pence that caused the church tower to be incomplete, but he would have none of it. "I tell yer, it was the Devil who pulled it down," exclaimed he. Even in this enlightened twentieth century some country folk hold by the old traditions; they love them, and will not be robbed of them. I have met more than one old body who has declared to me her firm belief in witches, and her desire that they should be burnt, as they were in the good old days, "to prevent them doing the mischief they do." Of all weeds, superstition is the hardest one to destroy I know; even education fails to kill it. Only the other day

a highly cultured lady, not wholly unknown to fame, confided to me that she believed there was something in crystal-gazing. And surely narrow is the line that divides a belief in witchcraft and a belief in the craft of crystal-gazing. When I write "the craft" of crystal-gazing, I write advisedly.

Leaving Udimore, we soon reached Rye, a rare old town, as full of character as the wrinkled face of one of its ancient mariners; a town to dream in, and few such towns to-day there be. Its importance is but a memory, but its old-world flavour remains. Once a flourishing port—for many years till the time of Charles II. it was the favourite port of departure for France—now the sea has deserted it; in place of the waves that erst washed its walls, and even washed some of them away, a green waste of level marshes extends for leagues around. "The Salts," they are called, and of their lank grasses the wild wind makes waves as it passes—waves on land as well as on the sea. Of Rye the much misapplied term romantic might justly be written. Gently has Time dealt with it, for what he has done has been but to beautify it, and the glamour of history broods over all. Rye is a spot to rejoice the heart of the sentimental traveller; to rejoice the heart of the artist too, for it is full of pictures. It fascinates because of its ancientness, and Rye counts time by centuries. Were Rye only somewhere abroad, how Englishmen would rush to see it, and what words they would lavish in its praise!

But Rye is a town to be seen, not described, for when you try to describe it, you feel the limit of

words; for neither words nor the skill of the artist can possibly convey to paper or canvas its meaning and its peculiar charm. Rye is one of the very few places of which I have heard much and found all I have heard to fall flat before the reality. I have been content to give simply our impressions of old-world Rye, for of such a spot it is the impression that profits, not the guide-book details that turn a beautiful poem into dull prose.

Rye tempted us to stop and go no farther that day, but when we asked about rooms for the night at the hotel, we found they were all taken by American travellers, and that there was not one to spare for an Englishman. They had discovered the charms of the place and were in no haste to depart; yet Americans are not given to lingering. At this ancient port, and at other spots along the coast thereabouts, the fishing-nets are placed on stakes, which are called kettles. Hence very likely arose the saying, "A pretty kettle of fish." To-day the remark "A fine kettle of fish" may frequently be heard. So one travels and picks up odd bits of information.

To use an expression much in vogue in the coaching days, we "got away" from Rye by the old London road, and a very pleasant one it was, fair of surface, and not lacking in scenic qualities. This brought us unexpectedly back to Northiam, someway beyond which village we turned up a lane to avoid retracing our tracks of the morning. Very soon this lane revealed its rural charms. First we dropped down to a droning water-mill, to climb up again into a country of woods, passing a well by the

wayside having above it the legend, "The Earl's Well," a title that suggested some possible romance connected with the spot, but there was no one about of whom to ask its story. Then we drove into Benenden, the sweetest and neatest village imaginable, but beyond its undoubted prettiness there is nothing there to delay the traveller; prettiness pleases for the moment, but one desires a soul behind beauty.

Now for some miles our road led us through what I can best describe as an old-fashioned country, for therein we saw nothing but manor-houses, farmsteads, and cottages, all of the olden time, set amidst woods, green fields, and hop-gardens. The country bore a mellow, ancient look, as though it had suffered little change from the Jacobean or earlier days. The infrequent traffic we met on the road was purely rural traffic, consisting of farmers' carts and wagons, timber-wains, and carriers' carts. The carrier plays an important part in the economy of the remote countryside, for he supplies the needs of the isolated village; indeed, it is hard to imagine how the village could get on without him. Before he starts forth in the morning he collects his orders from its various inhabitants. Whatever is required he purchases for them in the town to which he goes, some six, seven, or it may be more miles away, charging only for the carriage of the goods and nothing for his time, trouble, and responsibility in making those many, and often trivial, purchases. He must needs have a good memory not to make mistakes; and as to the money spent, he is trusted much and not in vain.

He also calls at the lone farm-houses on his rounds and does the same service for them.

How out-of-the-way villages and remote farm-houses would get along without the homely carrier I know not. Once I took a farm-house far from a town for my summer holiday, and what I should have done without the daily passing carrier I know not either. He brought me the newspaper, books, tobacco, fishing-tackle, colours and brushes, and whatever else I needed from the town, as well as parcels from the station, faithfully executing all my commissions. During his frequent stops by the way the carrier gathers, and retails in turn, all the local news and scandal, often, be it confessed, enlarging upon facts to suit the tastes of his clients. His comings and goings are looked forward to with no little interest; he is not merely a deliverer of dull goods. As one villager remarked to me, "We could get along somehow without the parson, and us might manage without the doctor, but where would us be without our carrier?"

The stretch of quiet country brought us to Biddenden, a quaint and thoroughly old-world village far from the railway, one that has never felt the quickening throb of modern life; stilled, it seemed, in sleep when we were there—so still it was that we could almost hear ourselves breathe. The first thing that greeted us in this out-of-the-world spot was a little old-fashioned gazebo set at the end of a long, untidy garden; then followed some charming old houses. One had a big sun-dial on its gable end, another had a curiously sculptured stone head

set above its arched doorway, another had a high-pitched, lichen-stained, and grass-grown roof with a great stack of chimneys in front smothered in ivy, and below were some projecting bay windows of interesting design. The tiny village was full of character. Benenden was merely pretty; Biddenden was pretty and quaint besides. The names of the two places sound so much alike when spoken that the stranger in search of one might easily get misdirected to the other, and we were told that mistakes in this way often came about.

Stopping in its quiet street to take some photographs, we noticed some curious-looking biscuits or cakes in a baker's shop; these had stamped upon them the figures of two women side by side, quaintly attired, and the following wording:—

ELIS AN MARY
CHULKHURST
A IN
34 1100
Y
BIDDENDEN

We entered the shop to purchase one and to gather their purport. Thus we discovered the tradition of the Biddenden Maids. It appears, according to this tradition, that in the year 1100 (a fairly long while ago) Eliza and Mary Chulkhurst were born in the village joined together at the shoulders and hips, and they were known as the Biddenden Maids. They lived thus for thirty-four years, when one of them died, and the survivor, refusing to be separated from the body of her sister, died soon afterwards,

exclaiming, "As we came together, so we will also go together." The sisters left by will certain lands in the parish, out of the rents of which they directed that "one thousand cakes impressed with their likeness should be distributed to all parishioners and strangers on Easter Sunday after divine service in the afternoon"; which is done, and the cake we purchased was one of the number that remained over after all the worshippers had been supplied. The letters and figures on the cakes are intended to be read, we were informed, Aged 34 years in 1100. The door being open, we went inside the church, thinking possibly to discover there some memorial of the twin maids, but failed in our quest; the only things we noted were two much damaged brasses and an altar-tomb minus inscription or an effigy, where I think an effigy once was.

Proceeding on our pleasant way, we presently observed a tall tower, old and grey, with roofed turrets at the top, peeping over some distant woods. We promptly went in search of this, which our map showed to be Sissinghurst Castle. The sheets of the Ordnance maps we took with us proved most useful, being absolutely reliable, so that we had no difficulty in finding our way to any remote spot by their aid. Without so trustworthy and clearly printed a map we might have had some difficulty in reaching Sissinghurst Castle. When we reached it we found the remains of a once stately home converted into cottages, or doing duty as farm buildings, with the tower standing apart in solitary dignity, too dignified to mourn its long-lost grandeur.

SISSINGHURST CASTLE.

At Sissinghurst, when in its prime, Queen Elizabeth stopped and slept when on her "progress" to Rye; an historic detail I afterwards discovered, for till that day I had never heard of such a castle, so ignorant was I of one of the interesting and storied places in my own country. And upon consulting a modern guide-book to Kent on my return home, I found it no better informed, for all it had to say was, "Sissinghurst is an ecclesiastical district belonging to the parish of Cranbrook." Just that and nothing further about a castle being there.

Knocking at one of the cottage doors, we asked if we might be allowed to look over the ruins. A pleasant-faced and soft-spoken woman opened the door and responded: "I've got the key of the tower. I'll show you over it if you like; you can see the rest for yourself; but we keep the tower locked." So she procured the key, and we placed ourselves under her guidance. The tower we found uninhabited and bare. It contained a circular staircase giving access to a large cobwebby apartment on each story. One apartment, we were told, was formerly a guard-room, and off this was a windowless prison secured by a stout oak door; but there was nothing of architectural interest in any of them. On reaching the top, from the flat roof between two roofed turrets we were rewarded for our climb by an extensive and varied view over a rolling and far-stretching woodland country. There up aloft our guide began to relate for our benefit, and with much gusto, a ghastly story of its builder and former owner, one Sir John Baker, who lived in the reigns

of Henry VIII., Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth. "Bloody Baker he were called," said she, "and a regular villain he were too, a Papist who persecuted the poor Protestants, and robbed and murdered travellers besides. I've been reading all about him in a book called *The History of Bloody Baker*. If you be going by Cranbrook, you may buy the book in the town; it be very interesting; and there be a lock-up in the church there where the villain used to inter the unfortunate Protestants afore they were burnt at the stake. It be called 'Bloody Baker's Prison.' He made it hot for the Protestants, but I expect he be hot enough himself now, and serve him right." And the old woman became quite excited about his misdeeds, or supposed misdeeds. "Do you see that?" she exclaimed, suddenly pointing to an out-building below with a wide arched doorway. "According to the history I've been reading, a poor woman, finding the door of it open, sought shelter there one winter's evening; then at midnight, hearing footsteps approaching, she hid herself in a cupboard that was in a corner of the place. Presently she saw Bloody Baker and his man come in with a lighted lantern, and she watched them go up some steps to the loft above; presently she saw the man come down carrying a dead body, which they took outside and buried, after which they both returned, and the man went up the steps again and returned with another dead body. Now it happened, as the man was bringing the body down, the hand of it caught in the balusters, and the woman actually saw Bloody Baker chop it off

with his sword. The book says as how Baker and his man used to waylay, murder, and rob travellers, and so he made his fortune. In the morning the woman, terrified though she was, picked up the hand, which had a ring upon it, and so it came to the relatives of the dead lady, who was missing amongst a host of other wealthy folk, and the villainy of Baker was exposed." All of which sounds like the story of a "Penny Dreadful." But as our guide related the story to us, so have I faithfully repeated it, only somewhat condensed.

Then we consulted our map as to the road to Cranbrook, and we noticed "Baker's Cross" marked upon it at a point where four roads meet just before that town. "That's where the villain were thrown from his horse and killed," exclaimed the woman. "I read that in the book." A wonderful book, truly! Unfortunately we were unable to purchase a copy of it in Cranbrook; they were all sold out at the time of our coming, but more were on order. I wonder who the author was. On my return home I looked up the history of this Sir John Baker, and found that he died peacefully in London, nor could I find anything to justify the gruesome story of him we heard. He appears to have been a staunch Roman Catholic, a great persecutor of the Protestants, a favourite at the Court of Queen Mary, but hated in the country where he lived, so that possibly any evil story of him was good enough to be believed.

We soon reached Cranbrook, an old-fashioned town of narrow crooked streets, with a tall windmill towering above its ancient houses and even dwarfing

its stately church. Fortunately we discovered the church door open, and an old woman inside busily dusting the pews. We asked her if she could point out "Bloody Baker's Prison." "There it be," replied she, "up them steps and through that door. I've got the key of it." Then she fumbled in her pocket and presently presented us with a big key. The steps led up the side of what looked like a tall projecting stone pulpit. This, the woman explained, was the old "dipping-place": "you go up the steps and down some others into a deep bath in which people used to be baptized." So we went up the steps, and discovered other steps at the top leading down to a sort of well where people were formerly baptized by immersion. The well or bath is dry now, but we were informed that in the old times it was kept full of water. I have never seen anything like it before in any church; it certainly is a strange structure, and I should imagine a unique one. We understood that it was erected early in the eighteenth century.

Next, with some trouble, we opened the heavy oak door that gave access to "Bloody Baker's Prison," and found ourselves in a confined and dismal chamber, dimly lighted by a deeply-recessed small window with stout iron bars across it. The place is now a lumber store. It was doubtless, in ancient days, a lock-up such as existed in many parish churches, though to modern ideas it seems a strange place for a prison. As the Cranbrook people were always famous for their strong dissenting opinions, very probably a number of them were placed in

"Bloody Baker's Prison" during the Marian persecutions of Protestants previous to being tried for heresy; and possibly by Sir John Baker's orders.

Besides the curious baptistery we found much else of interest in the fine old church. On the chancel wall are hung three ancient helmets, two of which still retain their crests, and beside them are suspended some ancient gauntlets, faded banners, and a rusty sword, all of which recall the brave days of old. Then carefully preserved in a glass case that is fixed to a pillar of the church we espied an ancient, much tattered and torn tabard, and some small banners such as were placed at the end of a lance. An inscription below informed us that

> These ancient Insignia: viz. two Banderoles and one
> Tabard, hung on the south Chancel wall of this Church
> For over 200 years. They bear the Arms of Sir Thomas
> Roberts, fourth Baronet of Glassenbury
> Quartered with those of his wife Jane, eldest
> Daughter of Sir John Beal, first Baronet of
> Farningham.

Next our eyes fell on a window of beautiful stained glass set in the west wall. "We call that the patchwork window," exclaimed the old woman, and we noticed that though it contained old glass, some of it had been reset. Below this an inscription runs:

> To the Memory of
> Sir Richard Guildford of Hempsted who
> Died while on a pilgrimage at Jerusalem
> A.D. 1508. To his memory the ancient
> Glass in above window was placed
> In the East window of this church
> Removed thence and placed here A.D. 1874.

But why the window was removed from its rightful place the inscription gives no hint. The window is a very beautiful one and worthy of its proper and more honourable position. Shown in it, fortunately intact, is the figure of Sir Richard Guildford, that gallant knight who fought on Bosworth Field. The figure is quaint and artistically drawn, the brave warrior being represented with a pilgrim's staff and bottle. The ancient glass of this window possesses that rare gem-like quality that no modern stained glass ever has; the colour of it is glorious, being rich yet not gaudy; with the sunshine streaming through its many tinted panes, it looked to us like molten jewels. Did the church possess nothing else, it would be well worth a visit for the sight of this lovely old, quaintly-drawn window alone,—a precious specimen of ancient craftsmanship.

As we were leaving the church a marble tablet of some size on the wall by the porch attracted our attention by its beautiful lettering; the wording on this runs:—

> This tablet and three windows were dedicated by
> Robert Henry Eddy of Boston, in the Commonwealth
> Of Massachusetts, U.S.A., to the memory of his
> Ancestor the Reverend William Eddye, M.A.
> Vicar of this Church from 1591 to 1616.

Thus the ties of blood join the Old World with the New, ties that the wide sea can never sever. Proud of their ancestry "wherefrom their future grew," Americans, as Lowell puts it, "remember whence they came." At Cranbrook we learnt that an ancient local custom still prevails of strewing the

pathway before newly-married pairs as they leave the church with emblems of the bridegroom's trade. To Cranbrook Queen Elizabeth once came, at which period it was a wealthy place flourishing by the weaving trade, and it is recorded that she walked from the town for nearly a mile to the manor-house of the Hendleys, on broadcloth that was manufactured in Cranbrook and laid over the road for the whole of that distance.

We followed the road before us that led out of Cranbrook till we came to a spot by a pond; there we stopped to consult our map, for we suspected that we were driving back to Hawkhurst again. We discovered with surprise that this little pond was plainly marked thereon as "Tubs Lake." Now when a map gives such an insignificant thing as a tiny wayside pond a name, it suggests a cause for so honouring it. Could there be any story connected with the spot, we wondered? Just then a parson chanced to be walking by, and we ventured to question him on the matter. "That pond," said he, "got its name rather curiously. Doubtless you've heard of the moonrakers." We certainly had heard of the Wiltshire moonrakers at an indefinite spot "Up North" of Devizes, but never of the Kentish moonrakers. "You may know that there was a lot of smuggling done hereabout in the old days; the Hawkhurst gang, as they were called, were a famous band of smugglers. Now one night a party of them were carrying some kegs along here when there was a cry of 'excisemen,' so they hastily rolled their kegs into that pond to be out of sight.

The next night, so the story goes, the party came back with rakes to rake the kegs out, when again there was a cry of ''cisemen.' The excisemen coming up asked the yokels, as they considered them, what in the world they were doing. The moon happened to be reflected in the water at the time, and the innocent-looking 'yokels' replied, 'We be a-trying to rake the moon out of the water.' Whereupon the excisemen laughed loudly at their simplicity and went their way. So when the incident came to be known, the pond was christened Tubs Lake, and has retained that name to this day." Now, as before mentioned, I have heard a precisely similar story told of the Wiltshire folk, and a well-known story it is, though Wiltshire is an inland county. After hearing the parson's relation it appears to me quite probable that the original moonrakers were Kentish men after all. The very name of Tubs Lake is suggestive of it being the site of that episode.

We turned up another road to avoid Hawkhurst, and soon came to Goudhurst, a lonely village set on a windy height,—our map made this spot to be 419 feet above sea-level. Cobbett describes Goudhurst as "standing upon the very summit of the steepest and highest hill in the country." Goudhurst has an isolated look, thus lifted up above the world as though it had no part in it ; there we felt the inward meaning of the word remoteness. Excepting for its ancient and hoary church of goodly proportions, Goudhurst has little of interest for the sentimental traveller. From its elevated churchyard we enjoyed

a glorious view over a green wilderness of woods that clothed the hills to the sky-line, and we enjoyed besides the bracing breeze that greeted us there laden with the scent of forest trees. We were not left to enjoy the view long alone, for a boy found us out and civilly asked if we wanted to see the church ; if so, he knew who kept the key, and would run and fetch it, doubtless hoping to earn an honest penny where pennies were hard to earn ; so we let him go. Away he went, and brought back with him not only the key, but the clerk with it, who also probably deemed it an opportunity to earn an honest sixpence.

" It's a windy place," exclaimed the clerk by way of introduction as my cap blew off, " but bless you it's nothing to what it is in the winter time, it be enough to freeze the very marrow in your bones then. All the folk here be strong and hearty ; the winters kill all the delicate children, so only the strong ones grow up ; that's how a hardy race is bred." Perhaps it was this natural weeding out of the weakly ones in the less luxurious days of old that accounted for our sturdy ancestors ; now we coddle the weaklings, and they marry and breed a race of the unfit.

" Is there anything of interest to see in the church ? " we queried. " There be a lot of fine old tombs," he responded. Then he opened the door and we entered the somewhat cheerless interior, for there was no stained glass in the windows to shed a glow of colour upon the bare grey walls. The clerk was right, there were a number of fine old altar-tombs in the church, chiefly to members of the Colepeper family, six generations of which are buried here,

their tombs dating from 1480 to 1608, and there is a brass to a knight dated 1420. One of the tombs interested us not only for the fine carving of the effigies upon it, but because these are cut out of solid blocks of oak, the oak being gilt and coloured, and hard oak resists better than alabaster or even marble the knife of the unworthy initial engraver, moreover it is not so readily chipped. On one tomb (bearing the date of 1608) to the wife of one of the Colepepers is the following quaint verse :—

Her Father London Great evne Ruled
As MAIOR a worthye man,
Her mother borne of ancient stock
A Noble Grecian.

After Goudhurst we lost ourselves for a time in a tangle of narrow winding lanes. Our course was wonderfully indirect. I verily believe we managed "to box the compass" more than once, but we vastly enjoyed our devious wanderings, for we found ourselves in a lonely and very lovely country; a country, I fancy, few travellers explore, for the sign-posts there are scarce, the lanes are rough, and only lead to lone farmsteads and forgotten hamlets. For miles we met nothing but a farmer's cart, and that had to drive right into the hedgerow to give room for us to pass, so narrow was our way ; but in reverse ratio to the badness of the lanes was the beauty of the land, a land that won our hearts from the friendly look of it. Thither I hope to return another day and more leisurely explore some of its quiet corners and quaint old homes that have never been touched by the hand of the modern builder.

READY FOR THE ROAD.

Then we got on to better roads and into a country of hop-gardens, a country dotted with rambling old farmsteads, many of which possessed one or more of those curious oast-houses wherein the hops are dried, outbuildings that form such a pleasing and picturesque feature in certain portions of Kent and Sussex. History has it that a certain Frenchman whilst travelling through Kent mistook the curious conical roofs of these oast-houses for church steeples, and that he wrote home, "The English are a most religious people, even many of their farm-houses are provided with chapels."

After the tortuous and rutty lanes, we enjoyed, by way of change, our smooth, unimpeded run on the open road, so we sped merrily along rejoicing in an inspiriting turn of speed. Eventually we found ourselves in Foots Cray, one of the four Cray villages that have grown on the banks of the river of that name, and are known collectively as "The Crays." There we deemed it advisable to consult our map, as it suddenly struck us we were getting perilously near London, and London at all costs we would avoid. Our maps showed that we were close to Chislehurst, a place that for long I had associated with a collection of superior villa residences, and never dreamed that I should ever go out of my way to visit it. But some time ago a friend had told me that there were some wonderful artificial caves there of unknown origin or purpose, and that they had been explored for over four miles without coming to the end of them,—an underground maze of galleries and curious chambers. So now that by chance we

were close to Chislehurst, to Chislehurst we would go to inspect them. After hearing about these caves—in their way quite as strange and wonderful as Stonehenge—I consulted several modern guide-books to Kent, but not one of the number even mentioned them,—though they informed me that the ex-Emperor Napoleon III. resided for a time at Camden Place there, and that on Chislehurst Common was a handsome cross erected in memory of the Prince Imperial. A strange oblivion of perhaps one of the most interesting things in England. The observant traveller soon discovers how little the guide-book compilers know of their own land.

Reaching Chislehurst, we had no difficulty in finding the caves and procuring a guide in the shape of an intelligent youth to conduct us over them. We entered the caves by a hole at the foot of a wooded hill, each of us first being provided with a lighted lamp; then, for our benefit, our guide began to relate their history. "How do you come to know so much about them?" we queried. "Well, you see, sir, it's like this," he explained; "I takes a number of parties over the place, and some of them be very learned and seem to know all about it, so I listens to all they has to say, and gains my knowledge." And provided the parties be "learned," it appeared to us a fairly satisfactory way of gathering information. "I have shown a lot of antiquities over it," he continued. We presumed he meant "antiquaries." "Once we trained a dog to act as a guide, and he would take the visitors round the

parts we shows. I have never been able to get to the end of the caves myself. But the dog is dead now. He were a clever dog." We agreed. This is not, however, the first time I have heard of a dog doing duty as a guide. There used to be a fine collie, belonging to the landlord of an hotel in the Festiniog Valley in Wales, which was taught to conduct visitors to some famous falls half a mile away. You had only to mention the name of the falls, when off the dog would go to them with a wag of his tail; and he needed no tip.

Entering the caves, we first came to a large chamber; from this we proceeded through a very narrow passage into the wilderness of galleries beyond. In its present state this first passage affords only just room for one person to pass along at a time. "It used to be narrower before we enlarged it for the convenience of visitors," exclaimed our guide; "then you had to creep through it on all fours. They say as how the caves were originally an underground town where the natives used to live with their cattle so as to be safe from invaders. At the end of the passage you see there is a seat cut out in the chalk; here it is supposed a man armed with a hatchet was always on the watch, so that if an invader creeped through, he just chopped off his head and waited for the next one." So it would appear that one or two determined men placed there could hold the entrance against a host. Then we were led through an apparently endless labyrinth of passages, some having curious rounded chambers opening out of them, the passages being perhaps

ten feet high, and wide enough for two or three people to walk along comfortably side by side. The passages, opening out from one another, were so many we felt quite bewildered.

At one spot we noticed the massive thigh-bone of some huge prehistoric monster slightly protruding from the chalk. If the rest of its skeleton be there, as I imagine it is, it seems a pity that it is not carefully unearthed and set up in the Natural History Museum. Of course it was impossible to correctly judge of its size as a whole, or the kind of monster it belonged to, but from the huge bone we saw I should surmise that the complete skeleton is larger than any of the kind I have ever seen exhibited. Its position deep down in the chalk shows how great its age must be. Again I repeat it seems a pity that it should remain buried there out of sight.

The origin and purpose of these wonderful caves is as great a mystery to me as the mystery of Stonehenge. Another puzzle is what became of the enormous quantities of chalk that must have been removed in the making of them, of which there is now, at least, no sign round about. Perhaps the most probable solution of the mystery of the caves is that they were constructed by the ancient Britons as a retreat in case of need. They may have been kept provisioned, so that on the appearance of an overpowering foe, a whole tribe, with their families and their cattle, could retire underground and out of sight, for the vast caves doubtless afforded room for all. In favour of this solution we noticed what we presumed to be a well-hole in the floor of one of the

chambers, now partially filled by the debris that has fallen into it from the crumbling of its sides. With a water-supply and a stock of provisions at hand, a small host of the primitive Britons might have inhabited the caves for a lengthened period in security and out of sight of any foe. Doubtless the rude natives would keep a good look-out for the approach of any raiding party, and if they did not venture to give it combat, could in ample time disappear into their extensive caves—and safety. So that, with their cattle below, they could bide there for days, or weeks if need be, and the enemy would not be able even to obtain a sight of them. Presumably the entrance or entrances to the caves would be carefully concealed in woods; and even if the enemy discovered it or them, how could he force an entry? A raiding party needs food, and for the want of it, unless there were cattle to be captured, must soon depart.

To avoid London, we next drove southward to Orpington, a little village that, though only fourteen miles from town, has managed to preserve much of its old-time character. There are some ancient and interesting houses in Orpington, notably The Priory, formerly the manor-house of the Prior of Canterbury, that is said to have been originally built in the fourteenth century, though now much modernised, yet not hopelessly so. Some portions are claimed to be of even earlier date, and have the look of it. By an unexpected bit of good fortune we were able to see over this ancient house, and a most delightful and rambling old house it is. Its large galleried

hall, hung around with trophies of the chase, forms a charming entry, and in the winter days, when the wood logs are blazing on its wide and open hearth, it must speak a welcome. Amongst other things we were shown a curious underground chamber with a stone groined roof, said of old to have been a chapel, but supposed by some to be the beginning of a secret passage to the church. How familiar I am with that secret-passage story! Personally I am inclined to think it was the prior's cellar; the only doubt about this that occurs to me is whether it would be big enough for a lordly prior and the festive company it may be presumed he entertained.

CHAPTER V

A quiet valley—Running water—The birthplace of General Wolfe—Old houses and new ones—Squerryes Court—The spur of quietude—Commons, heaths, and moors—Two quaint and ancient inns—A talk about inns—An old-time parson—An historic manor-house—Things that are old—An interesting interior—A dream room—Wood fires and ingle-nooks—"Hiding-holes"—Show houses.

Leaving Orpington, we drove along a narrow lane, narrow without the virtue of being pretty; a lane that ended in a smooth, wide highway, which we followed for several uninteresting miles of constant rise. We kept to the highway under compulsion, for we saw no promising by-road out of it, only rough stony lanes and bridle-tracks that climbed the hill-sides, apparently leading merely to lonely farm-steads, or even, perchance, ending in a chalk pit. However, in time our highway plucked up a little spirit, and for a space became even mildly romantic where it sharply descended through overhanging woods on one hand and a steep cliff on the other.

At the foot of the descent we found ourselves in the overgrown village of Riverhead, whose only picturesqueness to-day is in its name, for the modern builder is much in evidence there with his numerous brick cottages without any saving sign of grace

about them ; and the modern builder of cheap houses is the greatest spoiler of scenery I know, and, alas ! he penetrates everywhere. An aggressively prim and very proper nineteenth-century church did not help matters ; a church

> Which looked as it had scuttled to its place,
> And pulled extempore a Sunday face ;
> Too smugly proper for a world of sin,
> Like boys on whom the minister comes in.

We made our way out of Riverhead by a retired road that we happily espied, glad to escape from the monotonous highway. We struck upon a lovely quiet valley, a valley with gently sloping hills on either side to enclose it from the outer world—hills dappled just then with gleams of sunshine and the purple-grey shadows of clouds. A clear-flowing little river, bright and cool, ran alongside our road and kept us cheerful company ; and what a companionable thing a river can be to the lonely wayfarer. "A river," exclaimed George Eliot, "seems like a living companion to me as I wander along its bank and listen to its low placid voice, as to the voice of one that is living." The liquid gurgling of running water, what a soothing sound it has ; it seems to have some message to convey, but who can translate that message into words ?

There is always life of some kind by a river ; thither the angler and the artist come at times, there old mill-wheels slowly turn and hum, the birds gather, and the lazy cattle find their way, standing in the water the picture of idle contentment. Though you be far inland, remote from

everywhere, a river brings you in touch with all the world, for the most slothful one finds its winding way to the sea, where you are free of the earth. The river is but a moving road. "Les rivières sont des chemins qui marchent," says Pascal.

As we journeyed on through this pleasant land we drove into a little old-fashioned town asleep in the sunshine. There was something about the place that took our fancy; not that it was picturesque, for it was hardly that, but because it was so homely and natural—a simple country town with rather a quaint inn, showing on its big swinging signboard a bold and effective representation of St. George and the Dragon. An old saying has it, "A bold signboard brings the customers." Beyond this there was nothing noticeable about its wide, sunny street, only a general look of pleasantness. We stopped to inquire the name of the place, and found we were in Westerham. Now Westerham had a familiar sound to me, though for the moment I could not remember why. Suddenly, however, I remembered that only a short time before I had been reading in the life of General Wolfe that he was born at Westerham; and how, besides, that famous soldier, on the very night of his attack on Quebec, had recited to his officers Gray's *Elegy*, then recently published, declaring "I would rather have written that, gentlemen, than have the honour of taking Quebec." So humble-minded a man was he, as great men mostly are. I wonder whether any presentiment of his approaching fate came to him

as he reached the now familiar line, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave"?

There is just the possibility, I thought, that the house in which that hero was born may still be standing, at least there can be no harm in making inquiry. At the same time I was quite prepared, indeed almost expected, that whosoever I asked would know nothing about Wolfe or his birthplace; but in this I was agreeably disappointed. The man in the street, of whom I sought the information, at once pointed out the house. "That's the place where General Wolfe were born," he responded, "the man as took Gibraltar." This historical slip we gladly forgave. "Quebec, you mean," I explained. "Well, it were one or the other," came the reply, and then the man hurriedly went his way. I am afraid he felt hurt at the correction, which made me wish that I had said nothing. I have known a public school boy make a worse historical blunder with small sense of shame.

An American traveller once observed, "England is a small island, apparently mostly composed of the dust of heroes." Probably the American overlooked the fact that the sacred dust of many of the Island Race rests in far-off lands, and some rests fathoms deep in the restless sea; but Britain bred them all. You cannot travel in England and escape the storied past, "the spacious days" of old, for it is a land of ancient memories. Here again at Westerham we had unexpectedly come upon history; glorious history, not the sad note it strikes in such places as Berkeley Castle where a king

was murdered, or Fotheringhay Castle where a queen was executed. I prefer my history bright and inspiriting, and generally find it so.

The house in which General Wolfe was born stands nearly at the east entrance to the town. It is a comfortable-looking, old-fashioned house, long and rather low, with a yellow-washed front at the time of our visit, which gave it a cheerful appearance; it stands close to the roadside with only a narrow strip of garden between. To make quite sure, we asked another man, a local tradesman we took him to be, who was passing, if it were the house in question. He assured us that it was, and even pointed out to us the three-lighted window of the room to the extreme left of the building where that important event happened. We were delighted to find that the memory of Wolfe was so carefully preserved in Westerham. It is not always, alas! that heroes are so well remembered locally, for fame is fleeting. The uneventful to-day looms larger in the eyes of country folk than the eventful days that are past. Their memories are, at the best, mostly limited to their lifetimes.

The house in which Wolfe was born is to-day, as it has always been, a private house and has not degenerated into a mere show place, which, personally, I feel a fortunate circumstance. To view the room in which a famous man "first saw the light of day," as the guide-book compilers love to put it, always leaves me cold; it merely satisfies idle curiosity, for what power has a man over his birthplace? If he had any, certain great poets

and other notable men would, perchance, have selected more romantic spots than was their lot for that important event. But to see the loved "book room," favourite easy chair, desk, or actual handwriting of a man who has made for himself a name in this struggling world, is, possibly, to glean something of his personality; these he has graced, they are individual and hallowed. A past presence seems to linger with them; you need not be a relic-worshipper to prize them, they are something more than mere meaningless relics.

Even when curiosity prevails, and you gain admission to a house to see the room in which a famous man was born, you must not always be too sure of seeing the right room, if the following extract from a London paper of a year or two ago be true. "The room shown in Ecclefechan as the one where Carlyle first saw the light, and in which Americans shut their eyes to dream of his baby-cot, is merely so exhibited by the present inhabitants of the house to suit their own convenience. The other room, as they sometimes explain—namely, the real birthplace, is full of odds and ends, and too small besides to make a good show room. So the larger room has been promoted."

Just below Wolfe's birthplace, on the opposite side of the road, is Quebec House, where the Wolfe family afterwards lived; a charming, time-worn, gabled manor-house of Elizabeth's day, when men knew how to build both well and picturesquely; a house of no great size, but of much beauty in spite of alterations. I wish we built such houses nowa-

days. Perhaps we should if we built for posterity, as our forefathers did, with their pride of so doing, and not for temporary dwelling, as is mostly the case. We, too frequently, have many homes during our lives, not one. An estate agent in a large watering-place once told me that the average length of a resident's stay there was under seven years; the sentiment of long abiding in one spot is repugnant to our restless age. So the old home, where son succeeded father, generation after generation, is becoming rarer and rarer; the new home is generally built by contract at the lowest tender—and looks it; that is, when we trouble to build a house at all, and not merely lease one, adapting ourselves to it the best we can, as a hermit-crab fits himself into a shell. The new conditions do not make for beautiful building; how can they? Take almost any country town and compare the modern houses there with those of old times, often alongside, and how great is the contrast in favour of the old, picturesquely considered. The modern building lacks both interest and beauty, it is not built by craftsmen who delighted in their task, but by workmen we have turned into machines; and you cannot get feeling or individuality out of a machine.

The mason and carpenter of to-day are skilful enough, but it is skill without imagination; they trust wholly to the prepared plan and to the foot-rule, which entails no great thinking; so their work is uninspired and uninteresting, there is no happy accident about it. Even age, though it may soften the harder features of a modern building down,

cannot give it grace; it can only make it less ugly. I have noticed that in old buildings seldom is a window, a gable, or a doorway absolutely true to the main lines of the structure; generally the deviation is but slight, and only apparent when looked for; nevertheless it is there, and it is this very irregularity that unconsciously pleases the eye —there is no soulless uniformity about it. The old builders gave much thought to good, and therefore pleasing, proportions; not only to the whole, but to the details of windows, doorways, gables, roofs, and chimneys, though not exact to inches as to the placing of them. They studied the mass, and did not trouble overmuch about the precise position of details. They were not mere human machines; they used their eyes and their brains more than the foot-rule, and "builded better than they knew."

Just outside Westerham we passed Squerryes Court, a mellow old brick mansion set in a beautiful and undulating park where fine beeches flourish. As pleasant a home as may be found in all the land. In this park Wolfe, when a lad, used to play soldiers, and fight mimic battles, with the son of the then owner and other boys from the school in the town that they all attended. "Here first was Wolfe with martial ardour fired," runs an inscription on a stone monument set up to his memory in the grounds. I think that if Wolfe could come back to life again, and revisit the scenes of his early exploits, he would note but little, if any, change since he played soldiers there, before he played the game in real earnest. It is one of those remote rural spots that

seems simply to mark time; a bit of old England set in the midst of the new, where the centuries come and go unheeded by. Such quiet haunts as these have bred many brave and gallant men; perhaps their very quietness has acted as a spur to urge enterprising spirits out of them; and honest ambition is no evil thing, rather is it a healthy stimulus to prevent an able man rusting his soul away.

> Happy the man whose wish and care
> A few paternal acres bound,
> Content to breathe his native air
> In his own ground,

sings Pope; but such men do not help to build empires, or to keep them. Honour be to Wolfe!

Shortly after Westerham we climbed on to the high and open ground of Limpsfield Common—relatively high to the surrounding country, that is, for of itself it is of no great elevation, my Ordnance map marking it as only a little over 500 feet. Still the blue sky above looked bluer and farther away than in the valley below with its denser, damper air; and the wandering wind laden with the freshness of open fields and wild-flowers blew refreshingly upon us with just a suspicion of keenness that made the warmth of the sun welcome. The sun in England is nearly always a friend, not, as in more southern lands, an enemy to be guarded against.

It is a good thing for country dwellers to have these wide open spaces, flushed with pure air and sunshine, to wander over at liberty. There is just a sufficiency of wildness and feeling of freedom

about them that appeals to, if it does not wholly satisfy, the inherited instincts of the primitive man, who once was free of the earth. Commons, heaths, and moorlands—disorder in a land of order—come as a relief after the cramped monotony of hedge-bound fields, on which latter, moreover, one is a trespasser. Even a village green—I would all villages had their greens—gives, in some small measure, a certain sense of openness, a spot of escape from the dusty highway with the soft green-sward under one's feet.

Of Oxted, the next village we came to, I have now no distinct recollection, except of a quaint and ancient half-timber inn there with an odd outside stairway; its signboard, projecting boldly over the road, proclaiming it to be "The Bell." It is significant how such an unpretentious specimen of old-time building should have impressed itself so upon me that, when all else in the village is forgotten as though it were not, the old inn still remains plainly outlined in my mind's eye. Such is the power of the picturesque; for its sake a famous artist delights to paint the primitive labourer's cottage, but whoever heard of an artist setting up his easel before a palace to portray it?

A stretch of country, neither remarkable for its beauty nor the reverse, brought us to Godstone with its ancient hostelry, "The Whyte Harte," to wit, that according to tradition was a hostelry in the far-off days of Richard II.—the white hart couchant was the badge of that king, though this proves nothing; it certainly existed and flourished in the

days of Elizabeth, and a goodly portion of Elizabethan work it still retains. It is a rambling, old-fashioned, and somewhat ramshackle house that has outlived much history, that has seen the pack-horse, the coaches and post-chaises come and go, the motor car arrive, and promises in spite of its years to outlive generations of travellers still unborn. Theodore Hook has made use of it in his novel *Jack Brag*, and other well-known writers have immortalised it in their works, if my memory serves me right. A board affixed to the exterior of the building bears the following inscription :—

Ye Olde Inne
Yclept Whyte Harte
Established in ye reigne of King Richard ye 2nd
Enlarged in ye reigne of ye
Goode Queene Bess
Honoured by frequent visits from
Her Most Gracious Majestie
Queen Victoria.

The railway left the old inn high and dry for a time, but first the cycle, and afterwards the motor car, more surely awoke it from its long sleep ; the seemingly impossible had happened—the resurrection of the road! The landlords of the country inns began to open wide their eyes with delighted surprise, and forthwith began to refurbish their premises, not before they wanted it. Profitable customers had come again their way. The ostlers were at first none too sympathetic ; but finding that the motor car meant money, and that soon the motor cars outnumbered the horses even at an increasing rate, they philosophically accepted the

situation, touched their forelocks as deferentially to the arriving motorist as to the horse-driver, and pocketed their tips contentedly.

The Whyte Harte faces the village green and pond—a fact that adds to its pleasantness. It is a genuine old-fashioned hostelry, whose walls, if they could only speak, might many a tale of bygone revelry unfold; for, if tradition may be relied upon, rare goings on took place there in the merry days of old. As late as 1815 it is said that "the Regent, the Czar of Russia, and many royal visitors stayed at the inn on their way to Blindley Heath, some four miles away, to witness a pugilistic encounter for the championship of England."

In these days of the commonplace it attracts the traveller by its present picturesqueness, as well as by its time-gathered traditions; no lover of past days and past ways could pass it unheeded by, for age has fraught it with romance. But fully to appreciate the charm of such an old-world inn, it needs a weary wayfarer to approach it, footsore and benighted, not dreaming of such good fortune, and to see the ruddy light streaming through the lattice window-panes, and even a warmer glow, that bespeaks a hearty welcome, thrown athwart the roadway from the wide-open door. A moment to be remembered.

Many a writer both before and after Izaak Walton's and Dr. Johnson's days has written long and lovingly in praise of the homely wayside hostelry; it is, in truth, well worth the toil of travel to find such a harbour of rest for the night. "Do

you object to talk about inns? It always seems to me to be very good talk," said Thackeray; certainly it makes for cheerful remembrance. "A good novel is full of inns," according to Birrell; and when I come to think of it, the novels that chiefly please me, such as those of Dickens, Stevenson, and others, deal largely with inns. Having such high examples before me, I may perhaps be forgiven if I gossip, every now and then, about inns; I trust not overfrequently, for the subject is tempting—and inexhaustible.

After Godstone we kept for awhile to the wide main road, which was pleasant enough without being excitingly so; but at a convenient opportunity we left it for the leafy lanes again. Much of the ancient beauty of the land is preserved in the lanes; there you may find the rambling old farmstead with its colony of outbuildings, its barns, and its ricks; primitive and picturesque cottages, weather-stained mills with their whirling sails, and, here and there, a grey and gabled manor-house, half-hidden by ancestral trees, remote in time, if not in space, from the aggressive outer world—poems all. On a lane the features of the landscape are mostly those of the olden days, for there the centuries come and go with little outward sign of change; so the country has a mellow look, the bloom of age is upon it. If you are wandering through the land in search of beauty, always take to a lane when you can, for the lane goes into the heart of the unspoilt country, and you may perchance make delightful discoveries thereon, as we did that day.

The lane led us first to Horne, a village of little interest, that long years ago possessed a parson who achieved a certain sort of fame from the fine sermons he preached on Sundays and the choice scandals he retailed on week-days—a strange mixture, it seems to me. Beyond Horne we passed through "a succession of trees and green fields" (to borrow an expression of Dr. Johnson); the country was flat and the scenery somewhat monotonous, but away in the distance, beyond the flat fields, we had a charming prospect of wooded hills all golden green in the slope of the sun. The hills seemed to call upon us to explore them, so towards the hills we steered our course as directly as the indirect ways allowed. Some country lanes resemble a gigantic maze, so irresponsibly do they wind and wind about that you can never feel quite sure of arriving at any point you are making for, at least without doubling the apparent distance—fortunate if you arrive where you desire at that. If you go across country over unfamiliar lanes, you must be in no hurry; the lane is for loitering; it exists for local convenience and not for that of a stranger in the land. But if you simply desire to drive leisurely about country, so that the eye may enjoy its charms and pleasantness, then the lane is wholly delightful. Only to the leisurely wanderer is the innermost spirit of the English landscape revealed.

As we drove quietly along in a day-dreamy mood, our senses were quickened by the sight of a grey old Elizabethan, or Jacobean, mansion of

A JACOBEAN HOME, SMALLFIELD PLACE.

many gables and mullioned windows that came full into view, and but a stone's throw off the roadway,—a picture in stone, a ballad in building, as well as a home for man. One sees such delightful old houses in paintings, often, I fancy, invented out of the artist's romantic imaginings; but here we had the poetic actuality before us—a realised ideal. I shall not readily forget the thrill of pleasure the wholly unexpected vision of it gave us, just, too, when the mind, seeking entertainment and finding none, was growing a little weary of the monotony of the dull road and level landscape. It was like coming upon some rare and beautiful, but unknown poem quoted in the pages of a prosy book.

This ancient, ivy-clad, and time-stained home we discovered to be Smallfield Place, a house with a history—and it looked its part. You cannot precisely define why one old house should impress you more than another, yet such is the case. There is a spirit of place, a something more than the eye actually sees, that possesses one, and raises thoughts in the mind that cannot be analysed; they are too indefinite for that. Were I a ghost, Smallfield Place is the sort of house I should select to haunt, even though I had no family connection with the place; yet, as far as we could gather, no spectre had ever favoured it—a clear case of a neglected opportunity.

We were kindly permitted to photograph this interesting old place, and afterwards were fortunate enough to obtain permission to view its quaintly picturesque interior. "I love everything that's old.

Old friends, old times, old manners, old wine," wrote Goldsmith; he strangely forgot to add to his list, old houses. Of course, I mean the right kind of old houses; for there are old houses and old houses, as there is old wine and old wine. I have lived for a month in a house built in the days of James I., a house that has suffered hardly any alteration since that day, except for the addition of bath-rooms; but it has been kept in perfect order and repair, and never, I think, have I been quite so comfortable in any modern house, although some of the latter were "replete with every luxury and convenience," as the estate agent has it. The bay windows with their cushioned seats; the wide open-hearth fireplaces; the low beamed ceilinged rooms with their panelled walls had such a picturesquely comfortable look. The mullioned windows also, with their many lattice panes, seemed to add to the snugness of the olden chambers; for they gave one the feeling of enclosing space, whilst the modern plate-glass window suggests to me but a glazed void; so perfect is plate-glass it might be solidified air. And having got this luxury in glass, we try to disguise its bareness with lace curtains.

In this wonderful age we have learnt to live luxuriously rather than pleasantly, and luxury does not always mean real comfort, though many people fondly think it does. Give me a winter's night, panelling around my ancient chamber, the curtains drawn, a deep-cushioned Elizabethan arm-chair which you sink into, with head-rests at the top—I have sat in the original article, merely recushioned,

so I know what it is, not one of your Wardour Street imitation articles—a blazing wood fire on the ingle-nook hearth, a postprandial pipe, a really interesting book to read, and a shaded oil-lamp to read it by: that is my ideal of genuine comfort, the very absence of any glare or glitter makes for the perfection of restful ease. I write from actual experience, not from poetic fancy. The experience of a month of days, not of a single day when the novel surroundings and the sentiment of them might arouse feelings of a fictitious ease for the moment.

Smallfield Place has had a chequered career, and this is what we gathered of its history. Originally it was erected towards the end of the reign of Edward III. During the reign of James I. the property was purchased by one Edward Byshe, a lawyer who greatly flourished during that period, and grew rich by fleecing his wealthy clients. Byshe practically rebuilt the house externally, though within a good deal of interesting fourteenth-century work remains. Byshe unblushingly boasted that he had bought the place mainly with the money he had extracted from fools who had no business with it, excusing himself on the score "that if I had not fleeced them some one else surely would." After Byshe's day the old mansion fell upon evil times, a portion of it was pulled down, and the rest converted into a farmhouse; this in turn suffered much from neglect. Then, in the course of years, a new owner happily came into possession of the old place who lovingly restored it backwards, as far as possible (both externally and internally), to the original

intention of its Jacobean architect, and made it sweetly habitable again.

As to the interior of Smallfield, the first thing that pleasantly strikes the visitor is the substantial and finely proportioned oak screen, of the fourteenth century, in an excellent state of preservation; this comes between the outer hall and the large inner hall or withdrawing room. This latter spacious chamber is panelled from floor to ceiling in the good old-fashioned way. Here is a delightful open-hearth fireplace with a great oak beam above, and ancient dog-irons stand on the hearth below for burning wood. The fireplace, with its ample ingle-nook, has seats on either side, where host, hostess, and guests may sit and converse at ease in the cheerful glow of blazing logs, enjoying the while the fragrant incense of the burning wood, redolent of the forest whence it came. "A nook of rest for host and guest" I saw once cut on the over-beam of one of these ancient ingle-nooks, an excellently suitable motto, it seems to me.

How cheerful is the ruddy glow of a log fire, how fantastic are the varying shapes of its many-coloured flames that shoot upwards with a subdued roar to the wide-open chimney above—it almost seems to talk to you. How insipid and uninteresting a black coal fire is in comparison. All fires are companionable, but in this respect one of wood excels all others, it is the fire of an epicure; it radiates an even heat and never is unkindly fierce; it delights the eye and spurs the imagination. What romances have I not weaved when sitting in my

"MY AIN INGLE-NOOK."

wide ingle-nook at home, listening to the crackling and hissing of the burning logs, watching the mysterious gleams of light and shade playing on the panelled walls and on the big roof-beams above, till perchance a log would suddenly fall and a great blaze would cause my cosy study to "burst flower-like into rosy bloom." For I have built myself a real old-fashioned room, a faithful copy, as far as I could make it (down to the very hinges on the doors), of one I know and love that was built in the picturesque days "of good Queen Bess," a dream of long years realised. The oak panelling of its walls, and the big cross beams of its low ceiling have all been worked by the adze, the stone mullions of its windows show the tool marks of the mason, the *ipsissima saxa* he laid there, not being scraped down into a meaningless finish; "the grey stone new, yet not smugly so, new and yet possessing distinction, marked with character,"—a room "beautiful with a strange new beauty, born of what it had and what it had not, all the woodwork natural, unpainted, and faintly scented of the forest." Everywhere the hand of the craftsman is in evidence, every inch of stone and wood work is varied by the human touch that sanctifies the whole. A room into which, when weary of this troublesome world, I can retire and forget all about it. I have built something more than a mere room surrounded by four walls—I have built a picture. A dream room where "in the winter of my discontent"

> Shut in from all the world without,
> I sit the clean-winged hearth about,

Content to let the bleak wind roar
In baffled rage at pane and door,
While the red logs before me beat
The cold line back with pleasant heat;
And ever when a louder blast
Shakes beam and rafter . . .
The merrier up its roaring draughts
The great throat of the chimney laughs.

But I am becoming discursive, a fatal thing for a writer to do unless he has the rare charm and genius of a Lamb or a Stevenson. To return to the interior of Smallfield Place. From the ingle-nook in the large hall access is, or was, obtained to a "hiding-hole" in the floor above, a relic of the fourteenth century, when no house of any importance was considered complete without at least one "hiding-hole," more or less cleverly concealed. It astonished me to learn from an architect that, even to-day, "hiding-holes" have not gone wholly out of fashion, for he told me when designing a large modern mansion he was instructed to devise a secret hiding-place, which he did. The reason for the construction of this was not revealed, but the fact set me thinking.

The oddly-shaped dining-room of Smallfield Place is also a picturesque apartment, with its oak-panelled walls and deep window bays; it seems to call for the gallant gentlemen and stately dames of the olden days; the background is there, but the guests have long since departed, never to return again. Here we were shown the original and massive oak table, a table too strong and solid to groan under the heaviest feast that could be spread upon it. This table, we were told, was too large to be

removed through either door or window, so it must have been fashioned within the room after the house was built. They surely furnished for posterity who furnished thus?

We quite expected to be informed that Queen Elizabeth slept one night at Smallfield during one of her many progresses. She really ought to have done so. Unfortunately the old house lacks this bit of history, or tradition, that so many less likely-looking houses claim. In one old grey stone Cotswold mansion I was shown the very chamber in which the "virgin queen" slept, though the date of the building, deeply cut on the front of it, was 1626. Still it makes a pleasant tradition, and adds to the value of a house as a show place; but the showman should be careful about his dates. In this case Charles I. or Cromwell would have served, but Elizabeth was impossible. Another old house I was shown, in which Charles I., I was told, once was a guest; but here again the date over the doorway was 1660, which put the story out of court. Of course, it is just possible that the dates on both houses did not relate to the first building of them, but to some after additions; but from the look of the houses, and the position of the dates, I think this improbable. Besides, I could find no record in county histories, or guide-books, of any such visits.

However, Smallfield Place can boast of the authentic record of Anne Boleyn having lived there for a time, and a letter she wrote from Smallfield is still preserved in the British Museum. As we were leaving the old house we noticed on the

gable-end of the porch a stone slab, with a coat-of-arms boldly carved thereon, doubtless those of a former owner. On the great oak door we also noticed a large and finely designed wrought-iron knocker of twisted scroll work, bearing the date of 1661. The craftsman must have been proud of his production to date such a minor detail; but it is a delightful and shapely specimen of his craft, of which he might be justly proud. A bit of art iron-work worthy of a place in a museum, though I trust it will remain where it is in its proper place till it rusts away in days remote.

CHAPTER VI

A sequestered country—The capital of the Weald—A bull ring—The ordeal of pressing to death—An alfresco meal—Wayfaring—The romance of the road—"The Pilgrims' Way"—Over the Hog's Back—Where a wind always blows—A gipsies' encampment—The leisured days of old—Comfortable quarters.

SHORTLY after leaving Smallfield Place we came to New Horley, a spreading village of neat "desirable residences," begotten of the railway, and not worth remembering or writing about. It has its history to make. After this we drove into a sequestered country of green fields, orchards, open commons, and meandering streams; a smiling country, with here a grey church tower peeping above the trees, and there a red-roofed farmstead half drowned in foliage, here a stretch of woodland, and everywhere green hedges. A sleepy land, given over to peaceful farming, and full of rural refreshment, where the days pass like dreams. The scenery was essentially English, but none the less beautiful on that account. For my enjoyment I do not need the stimulus of snow-clad peaks, of jagged cliffs, or glaciers; pretentious scenery that compels attention and calls for constant admiration soon wearies me; it is all very wonderful, but the lulling benevolent English landscape is lovable, which is the better thing. One is

the scenery of a blatant oleograph, the other that of a delicate water-colour painting.

I am afraid that the majority of Englishmen only realise the tranquil beauties of their own country when far away from it in distant lands. Sitting under the open sky one night by a roaring log fire, at a spot high amongst the wild mountains of far-off California, I had amongst my chance companions a burly Englishman, with no look of poetry about him. Yet this very man confessed to me, after having crossed the wide Atlantic and the American continent in search of scenery and sport, that a sudden homesickness had come over him, which he could not shake off, an intense longing to be back again amongst the simple green fields of his native land. "It's well worth travelling abroad," he said, "if only to realise how beautiful England is." In the spirit of Naaman of old, captain of the host of the king of Syria, he might have exclaimed, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"

I am afraid I could only but roughly trace our route upon the map, for we got lost amongst the pleasant winding lanes; though glad to be so lost, taking first this turning and then that according to our fancy, and with no other thought but the preference of the moment. Eventually we turned up at Horsham, though we might as well have turned up elsewhere, for all that we knew or cared; indeed, when we arrived at Horsham, we had to ask the name of the town, as we had no idea of it. Such desultory travel may not commend itself to others,

but it commended itself to us; there was such a delightful feeling of irresponsibility about it. When you travel by railway you are taken to a place by a despotic line; when you go roving by road you may arrive anywhere.

Horsham calls itself "the capital of the Weald"; it is something for so small a town to boast of the title of "capital." The village church of Alfriston, hidden away in a combe of the South Downs, also proudly proclaims itself to be "the cathedral of the Downs." So important, by title, becomes the unimportant.

Horsham is a clean, neat, and pleasant enough little town of many charming old houses, with a modern growth around of many commonplace ones; without the latter Horsham would be wholly delightful. As country towns grow they do not grow more beautiful, nor do our cities, though they grow more stately. The old Horsham houses are roofed with local stone, flat "slats" of a delicious warm grey, having a rough surface that encourages the growth of gold and silver lichen; and so a roof of it in time becomes a thing of beauty, as do the lovely stone roofs of the Cotswold country. There is, I think, no roof covering for a house so charming to the eye as thin split stones when good in colour, especially when sized down as in old buildings, the smallest at the top and the largest ones below in orderly array; each stone varies slightly from the other in tint, so that the whole forms a most exquisite mosaic. Modern houses, owing to the cheap transport facilities provided by the railway,

are mostly covered by thin, mean-looking slates, as these cost somewhat less and are easier to hang—but are monotonously uniform, surprising ugly, and utterly out of harmony with the mellow English landscape.

If you look down upon any ancient town from a church tower or any elevated position, you can readily pick out all the modern buildings by their ugly roofs. I heartily wish Nature had never produced the hideously coloured Welsh slate, it is the one serious quarrel I have with her. Cumberland provides us with a slate of a pleasant silvery-grey, but, for some reason I cannot understand, these are seldom used. I know a house, in the South Country, roofed with them, and it has an agreeable look. Though not supremely beautiful, still these grey-toned slates strike no discordant note in the countryside.

As we drove into Horsham we noticed a little rail-enclosed green, containing a large iron ring fixed to a round stone, and some ancient stocks; the ring, an inscribed board informed us, was "Horsham Bull Ring. Last Bull Baited 1813." Seeing us stop there, a man approached, presumably unaware that we had read the inscription, and exclaimed, "You may be interested to know that's where they used to bait the bulls." "A cruel sport," we replied. "Well," he retorted, "ain't all sport cruel? Fox-hunting's cruel; do you think the fox likes being hunted? Not much. But fox-hunting is a rich man's sport and bull-baiting was a poor man's pleasure. There's not much amusement

for a poor man in a place like this, so he's driven to the public-house. We are getting too soft-hearted." Then glancing at our car, he exclaimed, "As for that, motoring is a cruel sport. I wonder how many dogs you've run over and maimed or killed." We smilingly assured him that we had not run over one. At first the man looked incredulous, then he shot a parting shaft at us. "I see you be no sportsman," said he, and he went his way. I wonder if there be any truth in what Macaulay says: "The Puritans hated bull-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bull, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." Hume also remarks, "the sport of it, not the inhumanity, gave the offence."

Leaving the bull ring, we found ourselves at "The Causeway," a very picturesque feature of the place, having a long line of pollard limes on one side of it, and a row of quaint old houses on the other, with an ancient church of many-mingled styles at the end of it. The church has a tall and slender steeple, roofed with wood shingles; its exterior is pleasing, but within it is plain enough to satisfy the sternest Puritan. At some time it has been very thoroughly restored! It contains some interesting though much mutilated monuments, especially the altar-tomb of Lord Braose, who died 1396, and who is represented in the effigy of a knight in full armour. This is worthy of attention as showing the details and method of wearing ancient armour. There is also a very interesting brass, dated 1411, on the chancel floor, of a full-robed ecclesiastic. Though both head and foot of this are gone, the

robes remain, showing a richly-engraved chasuble, crossed stole, and alb. The Church of Rome realises the glamour that gorgeous vestments have for some minds, though not for all. Writing of Ely, William Winter, the American Shakespearian scholar, says, "In the stillness of the cathedral, with no sound of human voice, and no purl of ecclesiastical prattle to call you back to earth, you must indeed be hard to impress if your thoughts are not centred upon heaven. It is *the little preacher in his ridiculous vestments*, it is man with his vanity and folly, that humiliates the reverent pilgrim in such holy places."

Some years ago I was benighted at a rural Sussex inn, the landlord of which gave me the use of a little sitting-room for the evening, as the coffee-room was crowded with a noisy company. There I found stowed away in a cupboard a curious assortment of ancient magazines and pamphlets, some of over a century ago, and some even much older. For want of anything better to do, I took the liberty of looking over these dusty and musty publications, many relating to bygone Sussex, seeking entertainment and finding it by making jottings in my note-book of various items I came upon that struck me as interesting. It was a fortunate find, for many and curious were the extracts I secured; and the clock struck midnight before I had finished the making of them. On looking over these notes I find a few things concerning Horsham. Horsham, I discovered, was early in the fourteenth century famous for its manufacture of "well-sharpened

arrow-heads with tough shafts and bolts for cross-bows"; these were packed in barrels and taken, from time to time, to the Tower of London, and doubtless were used with effect against the king's enemies. For the English bowmen were the best in the world, as Crécy and Agincourt bear witness.

In an old magazine I also learnt that the last horrible ordeal of pressing to death occurred at Horsham in 1735. I had no idea till then that such a gruesome punishment ever existed. At that period, if a prisoner, when arraigned for treason or felony, remained mute, that is, if he declined to plead "guilty" or "not guilty," he was put to the torture of pressing. For this terrible punishment he was laid down bare on his back upon the prison floor, "and there were placed upon his body as great a weight of iron as he could bear, or more, till he answered the queries put to him—or died."

Then followed some horrible details about "the execution," how gradually more and more weights of iron, including a blacksmith's anvil, were laid upon the unfortunate man, and still he would not answer any questions; yet more weights were added till the prisoner died in great agony. The man, it appears, was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in a barbarous highway murder and robbery, some spots of blood and a portion of the proceeds of the robbery being found upon him. Probably, therefore, he was guilty; still it seems a mystery to me why he did not plead "not guilty," and take his chance of being convicted and hanged. For hanging would surely have been a quicker and less painful mode of death

than the slow torture of having the life pressed out of him? The following entry in the Record Roll of the Quarter Sessions of 1735, "Sussex to witt," relates to this event: "A pretended dumb man comitted by Sr. Henry Peachey, Knt., the 16th May 1735, was prest to death the 11th August 1735." So was justice administered in "the good old times." But let us away into the green, sunlit country again, and to pleasanter thoughts.

As we motored out of Horsham we drove down the narrowest street (and it appeared to be a main street too) that I have ever driven down; it was barely wide enough for the car. Fortunately it was short and free from traffic at the time, or I do not know how we should have managed, for it would have been impossible to pass a wheelbarrow there.

Horsham left behind, we soon found ourselves in a pretty country where shady woods abounded, and glancing up at a sign-post we observed the inscription "To Guildford" thereon. Well, Guildford served as well as any other place; to Guildford we would go, which was twenty miles on, we discovered by a milestone. But we were getting hungry, so we kept a good look-out for a retired spot for a halt and refreshment, and soon discovered one much to our liking. At one side of the road was a deep and fragrant wood of fir, on the other an inviting meadow sloping gently down to a purling stream, and not a human habitation was in sight; the road, moreover, had a delightfully deserted look, as though little traffic came that way. So there we

stopped the car, got down the luncheon basket, and spread our rugs in a snug corner of the meadow under the lee of a tangled hawthorn hedge and close beside a big oak, whose spreading branches afforded a welcome shelter from the sun. It was an ideal spot for a picnic, and the weather was ideal too, a day of soft sunshine, with hardly a suspicion of a breeze. There at "God's green caravanserai," roofed by the blue sky, carpeted by the smoothest of turf, soothed by the quiet murmuring of the stream, and cheered by the songs of birds, we spent two delightful hours; it was a spot "to dream down hours to moments." A great contentment came over us; our simple repast amid such pleasant surroundings seemed super-excellent, so much better than a meal taken within four cramping walls; the finest hotel in the world could not command such a room as we had that day.

Give me the needful inn for the night, a country inn if possible—even then I would rather camp out were it not for the trouble of carrying a tent and the publicity of it, as I prefer rather "to hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak"; but for the day-time always the open country with its fresh air and sweet odours. "The outer world," writes Stevenson, "from which we cower into houses, is after all a gentle, habitable place." Even when it rained—and without rain at times to keep green the country, where would the beauty of England be?—with our hood up and our luncheon basket ever ready, we fared well and comfortably in the car. We never allowed such a trifling thing as the teasing of the

weather to ruffle us. But as the old proverb has it, "Weather is the discourse of fools," so I will say no more about it, except that it is a very convenient topic with which to start a conversation when you meet a stranger on the way. I don't mind being called a fool—in a proverb.

It was very delightful after our repast to recline at ease on our rugs and in the bliss of laziness, having no feeling of neglecting any duty in being so absolutely lazy, to simply gaze on the blue sky above, and to watch the fleecy summer clouds go sailing slowly by; at such moments life is worth living. Then my wife went to gather a posy of wild-flowers, whilst I smoked the pipe of peace, and felt that after all it was a very good world, and only wished that all the people thereon knew how to enjoy it. But I was presently awakened from my day-dreaming by my wife asking, "What's the time?" "Never mind the time," replied I; "it shall be what o'clock I say it is.

> Time goes, you say? Ah no!
> Alas! Time says we go.

Life is pleasant here; let us dally on a little longer." It may even be that there is no such thing as Time, only an ever-present Now, an eternity behind, an eternity ahead, a matter the mind cannot grasp. But a truce to unprofitable reflections. We lingered on till the west was growing golden, and then we resumed our journey. The change from rest to movement is after all a pleasant thing.

We drove on in the hush of the late afternoon,

when the day's work is nearly done, and a prevailing peacefulness settles over all the countryside. It was a lonely land we passed through—a land rich in rural beauty, though wanting, I think, in memories, for I cannot call to mind anything of historic interest that has happened in all that twenty miles of country between Horsham in Sussex and Guildford in Surrey. A country sparsely populated, at least for England, it seemed to us, and all the more attractive on that account. We passed by, close at hand or a little way off, many a pleasant, old-world farmstead and many an ancient and picturesque cottage, with their blue films of poetic smoke curling upwards to the sky—for smoke can be poetic at times. More than once we caught a faint and fragrant whiff of burning wood, and felt the homeliness of it, as it reminded us of our own fireside.

We had the road almost wholly to ourselves, excepting for an occasional slow-moving farmer's cart or wagon, and a few straying sheep and cows with no one in charge of them, which, when we came along, by some strange perversity inherent in their nature, would meander all over the road in front of us. This reminds me of a Sussex incident. One day, on a winding lane, we came upon a mighty flock of sheep that most effectually blocked up the narrow roadway for as far ahead as we could see. A farmer was in charge of them, without even a dog, and after several vain attempts to get by, we appealed to him to help us. "What!" exclaimed he indignantly, "you wants all the road to yourself!" But as we prided ourselves on being polite

and considerate motorists, we merely begged him not to be put out for the delay he occasioned us; which if any reader thinks were words sarcastic, of course he is at liberty to do so.

As we neared Guildford an undulating range of wooded hills showed forth in front of us, then the inevitable suburban villa began to appear; still, the romance of the road was not at an end, for in a vacant space we espied a solitary finger-post pointing to a bridle-path, having thereon the legend, "The Pilgrims' Way." That legend suddenly set us thinking backwards to 300 years or more ago, for this was the old pilgrims' track that led from Winchester and the west to Canterbury. As Chaucer sung—

> From euery shire's end
> Of Engeland, to Canterbury they wende,
> The holy blissful martyr for to seeke.

The days of serious pilgrimages are over, in England at least; but still this ancient track the medieval pilgrims trod may be traced nearly the whole of its length from Winchester to Canterbury, sometimes in the lowland valley, but mostly along the sides of the lonely hills, where, here and there, the ancient yews that lined the path yet flourish, for the yew is a long-lived tree. The hardy yews so generally to be found in our country churchyards have seen many generations come and go, kingdoms wax and wane, and still live bravely on. In the old days "Every yeoman, and every dependent of every yeoman, was expected to have a stout yew tree before his door; and to this day the old

trunks may be seen which once provided the shafts that decided Crécy and turned the scale at Agincourt."

Any one wanting an object for a few days' tramp through a charming stretch of country, with the turf beneath his feet for many a mile, might do worse than provide himself with an Ordnance map, and by its aid explore this ancient Pilgrims' Way. According to the poet, it should at least be a rest-giving expedition—

> For if perchance I enter there,
> Life's din and turmoil cease,
> And for the moment I am in
> The pilgrim's chamber peace.

And who desiring it, would not purchase peace at so small a price?

Guildford did not detain us, though the day was growing old and the town had a homely, inviting look, for on glancing at our map we roughly judged that Farnham was only some ten miles farther on, a distance of no moment on a car. Now at Farnham we knew that there was a good old-fashioned hostelry wherein to take our comfort, with a large and pleasant garden in which to stroll about or rest at ease; but we felt uncertain as to finding the latter luxury attached to any hotel in Guildford. So on to Farnham we proceeded without a halt. The certainty of a good inn at the end of a long day's journey is well worth a few extra miles of travel, and makes those miles seem short. There is a great charm in a pleasant certainty, it makes

for a contented frame of mind. Many a time have I driven a score or more miles out of my way to reach a favourite inn for the night, an inn where I know that a hearty welcome awaits me, and where I am treated more as an honoured guest than a mere stranger seeking lodging; where my modest bill seems a mere passing incident of a pleasant visit, and is paid accordingly with great cheerfulness and not grudgingly. It is one of the rewards of travel to discover a good inn, and having discovered it, to return there from time to time. So you may dot the country with delightful resting-places.

A long climb brought us to the top of the Hog's Back, as that isolated stretch of hill is curiously called, a hill that rises boldly out of the level country around, and extends from Guildford till close upon Farnham. The drive over the Hog's Back is a delightful experience in the summer time, for upon the hottest day a cool breeze blows refreshingly across its windy summit; there is not even a village on the way, and but one lonely little inn, though there is a stray house or two whose existence, however, rather emphasises than disturbs the cheerful solitude of the road when by happy chance there are no other travellers at the time thereon.

The Hog's Back runs east and west and affords wide, unobstructed views over a far reach of country both to the north and to the south; from it you look down on the world around, and it is a relief to the eyes to look downward at times, they are so long accustomed to the level or the upward glance except

when reading, but then the focus is fixed and short and the eyes cannot indulge in the roaming over far spaces. I know no other such wholly charming ten miles of exalted and bracing road within the same distance of London. Owing to the nature of the ground, there are only one or two rutty, narrow, and unfrequented lanes leading up to it, so that the continuity of the highway is undisturbed; it is a road with a purpose, it is, you feel, purely a traveller's road, having no concern with the near-at-hand; it merely passes through the country, making direct for Winchester and the distant west, and your thoughts go with it.

To the north, far below us, stretched a vast and level plain, with "crowded farms and lessening towers," a plain with no visible horizon, for it faded away into a faint blue mist, a blending of sky and land. To the south the hill-side sloped more gently down to a green sea of woods, and peeping forth from these we espied, here and there, the red roof-trees and gable-ends of cosy cottages; away beyond, in long array, stood forth the purple hills of Surrey and Hampshire, amongst which Hindhead loomed prominently forth in the gathering gloom.

There were rough grassy wastes on either side of our road, backed by rough bushes and a few stunted wind-blown trees, and on one of these grassy wastes we observed a gipsies' encampment, with a fire of gathered sticks upon the ground. I ventured to remark to one of the tribe who was standing without, idling the time away, that he appeared to lead a gloriously lazy life. "And what

else do you do driving about the country?" he retorted with no great civility in the tone of his remark. I had hoped to get in conversation with him, and so learn something of his way of life, but his manner was not encouraging. The gipsy is the only person I meet upon the road whom I find it difficult, if not impossible, of approach. Doubtless he has good reasons for his taciturnity, but his camps are picturesque features of the roadside, which, for the sake of the picturesque, I should be loath to see done away with. The gipsy seems to have few friends and many enemies in the country-side. "How I love to see the camps of the gipsies," wrote Hazlitt, "and to sigh my soul into that sort of life." Once I ventured to say a word in favour of the gipsy to a good-natured-looking farmer, but he would have none of it. "I know him," said he; "I don't mind missing a few sticks to make his fire, or even a turnip or two to help him with his dinner, but I do draw the line at chickens."

Then in due course we dropped down to Farnham and to the clustered homes of men. It happened to be market day, so the streets were somewhat crowded with farmers' conveyances returning home, but we drove into the quiet courtyard of "The Bush," where all was peace. "The Bush" presents an ugly modern front to the road, but this portion of added building is given over to "commercials"; beyond, after driving through the archway, the eye delightedly rests upon the old coaching inn that has suffered little alteration. It is to-day as it was in the past, a pleasant and picturesque two-storied structure of no

pretentiousness, but suggestive of comfort and good cheer within. The outward look of an hostelry tells its own tale as plainly as the human face tells the character of a man. Both may deceive the casual observer, but rarely the practised eye.

How old is "The Bush" I should not like to guess, but it was a flourishing inn of the old coaching and posting days. Its red-tiled roof, a little uneven now in places, is surmounted by a tall weather-vane to show the way of the wind; and on its time-toned front, facing the courtyard, may still be seen its ancient clock with Arabian numerals, that gave the time to the arriving and departing wayfarers in the road-travelling days long before railways or motor cars were dreamt of; and still the clock keeps faithful time. In those leisured days of old, if report be true, much feasting and drinking took place within the walls of this historic hostelry.

> Ah! many's the magnum of rare crusted port,
> Of vintage no one could cry fie on,
> Has been drunk by good men of the old-fashioned sort

at "The Bush." Wonderful men those jovial ancestors of ours, who could drink off their three bottles of port overnight, and rise the next morning apparently none the worse for it. It was the succeeding generation, that did not drink the port, that paid the penalty.

Our room there faced the restful old garden, and had all the charm of a pleasant outlook and quietude; how different to facing the noisy street with nothing beautiful to look upon. Again I repeat, give me an

inn with a garden. We were fortunate during our journey in finding many such; indeed, as far as my memory serves, more than half the inns we stayed at were so happily provided, an agreeable surprise for us.

CHAPTER VII

In search of beauty spots—"The Jolly Farmer"—An old water-mill—Hop-gardens—Haunted houses—An encounter with a ghost—A drowsy old-world town—The country inn—Relics of a siege—A matter of history—A noteworthy exploit—A jolly miller—Racing a thunderstorm—Inn signs—In jovial company—An artist's life.

NEXT morning, whilst taking an early stroll round the town, we noticed some picture post cards in a shop window. Now we always make a point of glancing at these productions, as by so doing we frequently have had our attention called to something of interest in or about the place where we chanced to be that otherwise we might have missed. From photographs, moreover, one can form a fair opinion as to whether the places or scenes represented thereon are really worth visiting. One has not to rely upon an artist's drawing that may be greatly imaginative; so the strictly correct, if uninspired, photograph is a great help to the traveller in search of beauty-spots or quaint old buildings.

Now amongst the number of photographs displayed in that shop window was one of an old inn with "The Jolly Farmer" shown on its signboard, and at the foot of the card was printed "Cobbett's Birthplace." That Cobbett was born at Farnham I

vaguely remembered, but that the house he was born in still existed, or where it was, I had no idea. I purchased the card and learnt at the same time, without extra charge, that the house was just outside Farnham to the south, "only about five minutes' walk from here"; so after obtaining directions how to get there, I went off in search of it.

The road was not difficult to find, though to make sure we asked our way from time to time as we proceeded; everybody knew "The Jolly Farmer." I have frequently noticed that you hardly ever fail to get directed to an inn or a public-house; the way to either appears to be very familiar to the local inhabitants of a place. The road to the public-house is known to all. On my first visit to Stratford-on-Avon, many years ago, I first asked my way to the "Red Horse" inn, and this was promptly pointed out to me; then when I further asked where Shakespeare's birthplace was, the same man replied, "I think it be a little bit up the next road, but I baint quite sure"!

At the outskirts of Farnham, having crossed the Wey by a bridge, we discovered "The Jolly Farmer" right in front of us. It is a neat-looking building of some size, with a long red-tiled roof, and an odd gable at the end of it having a tall chimney at the side that breaks the too straight roof-line; the walls are yellow-washed, which tint gives the house a sunny appearance; the windows are leaden lattice ones, in keeping with the old building; beyond is a background of dark-leafed trees that throws the house into strong relief.

Cobbett managed to be born in a pleasant-looking place and spot, more pleasant still possibly in his day, as it was then a simple farm-house in the fields. Now there are buildings around it. "My father," wrote Cobbett, "was a farmer from whom, if I derived no honour, I derived no shame." Leading from Cobbett's birthplace we noticed an inviting road that tempted us to explore it for a short space. On one side of it was a wooded hill and steep, on the other was the winding Wey. Now a road that runs alongside a river has always a fascination for me. So strolling on we came to Weydon mill, an ancient structure of much picturesqueness. The old mill with the glancing water below, the sleepy willows bending over the stream, and the dark firs beyond makes a truly charming scene, just the spot to delight the eye of a landscape painter. "The rush of the water and the booming of the mill bring a dreamy deafness, which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound shutting one out from the outer world beyond," wrote George Eliot of Dorlcote mill, and the description aptly applies to the one at Weydon. I am grateful for the expression, "a great curtain of sound." It is a thing I have felt when close beside a loud humming water-mill, with the plashing gush of the weir beyond, but never could find words to define what I felt.

We left Farnham by the old highway leading Winchester, though we did not travel on it far, but took a turning up a narrow lane, to our right, just beyond the town. Curiously enough, we speak

of a road as moving, and not the traveller upon it; we ask, "Will this road take me to Dash?" "Where does this road go to?" We talk of a road as climbing the Cotswolds or crossing the moors; in writing and conversation the road goes to places like those in that mysterious land discovered by Pantagruel, "où les chemins cheminent." But then we talk of the sun rising and setting, though it no more rises and sets than the road goes. And this digression just because I wrote of the highway leading to Winchester, when it suddenly struck me that the highway never leads, nor goes, nor climbs, nor descends, nor crosses hills, but simply stands where it is.

We were soon in the quiet country again, and amongst hop-gardens, that to my eye, with their clustered golden fruit dangling in the breeze, are quite as beautiful to look upon as the trim vineyards of France or Italy; but the vineyards are broad, and there must be some hidden virtue in the far-away, otherwise so many writers would hardly have declared there is. Still, for one, I never could prize distance for distance' sake. Our lane led us into a lazy land of still woods and tilled fields, but not a soul did we see at work in them, nor any vehicle or foot wayfarer did we meet for miles. We could not have been more alone in the wilds of Western America. The population of England strangely clings to the railways and the main roads. Away from these you are in a land of peace.

After a time we came to a desolate-looking spot where four lanes met at a corner of waste ground; truly there was a cottage or two near by, but with

COUNTRY LANE AND COTTAGES.

no one within of whom to ask the way; and a house uninhabited is like clothes without a body, both give a depressing feeling of vacancy because of the pointed absence of humanity. Even a deserted moated grange may have its ghost, which gives a certain sense of companionship; but a deserted cottage does not possess this romance to appeal to the imagination, for never yet have I met with a haunted cottage. Ghosts, I fancy, have somewhat aristocratic leanings; they favour panelled chambers, mysterious staircases, long passages, and ancient halls; they are most particular as to the stage setting. At least during my many pilgrimages about England, covering much country and many hundreds, I may safely add thousands, of miles, I have only once come upon an ordinary modern house with a well-established ghost, and this was a farm-house at Halton Holgate in Lincolnshire.

Hunting after haunted houses is in one sense a dispiriting sport, for though haunted houses abound, I never could run down a ghost; at least only once, and then it hastily ran away from me. It happened thus. I was staying, with other guests, at a genuinely haunted house in Scotland. The owner was a strict Presbyterian, and always assembled his whole household for prayers, night and morning, in a large hall with a great window overlooking a dry moat and garden beyond. It was the winter time when I was there, and every night during prayers a ghost-like figure could be dimly seen passing by the great window outside on the slope beyond the moat. The old family ghost. It was the talk of the house,

and no one appeared to care to venture without at that hour; indeed, our host was most particular that all his guests and servants should be assembled in the hall for prayers, so that, not to give offence, no one absented himself or herself without some good excuse.

After four nights I conveniently had a bad headache, and went to my room, but when prayers had begun, I stole quietly down the servants' staircase, let myself out by a side door, and with a big stick in hand awaited the coming ghost (he was always punctual, I had noticed) in the dark security of a big yew tree on the garden top of the dry moat, and in full view of the hall window, which was shutterless and curtainless. I did not wait long, for that night the ghost chanced to be pre-punctual. I saw a mysterious white figure coming quietly along; just when it had arrived between myself and the window I rushed at it with raised stick; I heard quite a human shriek and plainly saw two human feet beneath what I took to be a white sheet,—but, alas! I lost my balance and fell down to the bottom of the dry moat. I hurt myself somewhat, but so effectually did I scare that particular ghost, that he or she never appeared again, at any rate during my stay, though patiently watched for every evening by the worshippers, who by the way could both pray and keep a sharp watch for ghosts. This is a bit of unvarnished history; I could easily varnish it were I so minded. And that is the sole outcome of over twenty years' hard ghost-hunting.

In one sense, I have said that hunting after

haunted houses is a depressing sport, in another it is very rewarding, for it takes you to all sorts of delightful old homes, situated in remote nooks and corners of the land, that, but for this novel and interesting sport, you would never have visited. Amongst the number a time-worn home lingers lovingly in my memory. I had heard much of this old hall (built in the sixteenth century, and of its ghost, which is said to have frightened away more than one nervous guest) from a friend who kindly drove me many miles to see it. Excepting that it was inhabited, moated, and cared for, it would well have served for Hood's haunted house, for no house I have ever seen looked more the part: even in an unromantic photograph it looked it, which is surely a severe enough test.

To reach the place we drove down to the foot of a wooded valley, a hollow of beauty hidden amongst the hills, and there we came to a somnolent village of half-timber cottages that faced a tiny triangular green. The village had an age-worn look, as though it were tired of being so old. A dreamy spot remote from everywhere, to which a stranger, I should imagine, never or very rarely found his way. At the end of the village a heavy "lion-guarded," quaintly-wrought, and rusty iron gate stood wide open, I doubt if it were ever shut. This gave access to a long avenue of stately Scotch firs, at the end of which stood an

> . . . old Hobgoblin Hall,
> With weather stains upon the wall,
> And chimneys huge, and dark and tall.

The rambling old building overrun with ivy brought to mind one of the romantic creations of Samuel Reid, that famous moated-grangeist artist of the *Illustrated London News* in the early 'eighties, only this was a picturesque reality of great gables, clustering chimneys, mullioned windows, with a big bell-turret crowning all, not a vain imagining. Indeed it might have stepped bodily out of one of Reid's drawings, even to the brooding sky above that hung over it poetically when we were there. A wide moat of weedy water encircled this relic of past times. This moat we crossed by a two-arched, moss-grown bridge, where a drawbridge once had been, and found ourselves before the great nail-studded front door, with a spy-hole in it protected by an iron grill, so that a doubtful visitor might first be safely inspected before the door was opened.

Within all was a profound peace; an almost solemn tranquillity prevailed in its ancient panelled hall, hung about with armour, and in its panelled chambers with be-ruffled, fierce-looking ancestors adorning them. We were taken to the haunted room up a wide oak staircase, the steps of which were of solid blocks of wood worn slightly concave with the tread of generations, gone long ago to rest beneath their marble monuments in the hoary church near by. I wish that Hood had seen that haunted chamber; it truly had an uncanny look, with its walls covered with faded tapestry, its huge, age-darkened oak four-poster, its curious cupboards, convenient for the ghost to hide in, its deeply recessed and shadowy mullioned windows, and its heavy dark-beamed ceiling,

not to forget the villainous-faced ancestor whose portrait hung over the open fireplace, the ghost of whom, for some misdeed committed in life, now is said "to walk the room." I fancy few people would sleep comfortably there, for after all our surroundings do affect us, otherwise why do we take long and tiring journeys for change of scene?

I have ventured on this brief and inadequate description of a dear and dreamy old-world home, yet not too dreamy to be real, to show that the harmless hobby of ghost-hunting, though you never run your quarry down, is not a wholly unprofitable pastime; for the haunted house in question is but a sample of very many other delightfully picturesque and romantic ones that Fate has led me to, whilst in the happy pursuit of this uncommon hobby. The ghost is but the excuse for a pleasant excursion into many a tranquil nook in the land; and the mere remembrance of beautiful, and possibly legended, old-time homes in this way seen is a delightful possession in itself, at least for those who love old houses and feel the glamour of them. A sanitary faddist once told me, and told me seriously, that a house ought to be pulled down after it had existed a hundred years, in order to destroy the microbes gathered there. What a sad and ugly world this would be, did the faddists in it prevail!

But I have been digressing again and at length; one thought starts another, and so I find myself wandering everywhere but on the road. To return to the four cross lanes, at this spot was a corner of waste land and on it a dry disused well, covered

with a roofed timber structure of some pretence and intended to be picturesque, though why a well should be there at all was a wayside puzzle. On consulting our map we found that what we judged to be the spot had the honour of being marked thereon "Well," which serves to show how minutely accurate the Ordnance maps are. We were in a tangle of narrow lanes, and as one lane appeared to be as narrow as the other, we simply drove straight on, then after a time we emerged on a decent by-road which brought us to Odiham.

Odiham is one of those quiet, unimproved, wide-streeted, sunny towns that it is always a delight to come upon; if I may use such an expression of a place, it smiled at us. It is fortunate in possessing an unspoilt old coaching inn that, had we then been in search of quarters, would certainly have tempted us to sample its quality, for it had an air of unpretentious comfort. Since then I have heard that it possesses a fine oak-panelled room with a richly-carved fireplace mantel, both dating from the Elizabethan or Jacobean days, and a quaint oak cupboard at the side for the storing of wood logs. Some day I may pass that way again and take "mine ease" beneath the sign of "The George." I'll wager I shall not be disappointed, if much experience of road travel avails me anything.

Odiham is a delightful specimen of a drowsy old-world town, where no one seems to hurry, and where the sun seems glad to shine. Its wide street tells of a less crowded age, of "the spacious days" gone by the poet sings about, when every square yard of

ground was not carefully measured up and utilised, and nearly every house in a country town was provided in the rear with a garden of some kind, as a matter of course. The railway has not found Odiham out, for the nearest station to it is some three miles off; but Odiham seems to get on very well indeed without the railway, as do several other country towns I know. There are many such small towns in England—more than possibly some people would imagine—unblessed with a railway, and, as a rule, these are both picturesque and pleasant places; and the motorist, travelling by road as his forefathers did, who prefers to rest in quiet spots, may possibly add his mite to their mild, if sufficient, prosperity, for he must stop and spend his money somewhere.

Personally, I always strive for a real country inn —some of the most delightful and genuinely comfortable inns I know are situated right in the heart of the country, miles from anywhere—next an old coaching hostelry in a rural town best pleases me. It may be fancy, or it may be pure prejudice on my part, but I always feel more comfortable, more at home, more at my ease, at an old coaching inn (well cared for and well ordered, and with a landlord not unworthy of the house) than elsewhere. I delight to drive under its big archway, and to descend peacefully out of the bustle of the road—out of the rain, too, should the weather be wet. "A man in health," once remarked a famous American who had seen much of the world, "who could not be contented at an old English inn must have in himself the causes of his discontent." Another wealthy Ameri-

can, recently on a visit to the "Old Country," asked me to recommend him to a good old-fashioned rural inn. I mentioned one to him, built over two centuries ago, and but little altered since; and he wrote me, "We are very comfortable and like it immensely"; and this from a man used to the most luxurious modern hotels.

Odiham boasts of the possession of an enormous chalk-pit, which has the curious local reputation of keeping thunderstorms away; though how a chalk-pit could have any control over the weather I fail to comprehend. However, as a countryman once remarked to me, "You travels and learns." Certainly there are spots where thunderstorms rarely or ever occur; the reason of this I have never been able to fathom. The landlord of the little lonely inn at Everley, on Salisbury Plain, where we spent the night during a previous tour, said to me, "I have never known a thunderstorm here, though such storms wander round about some distance off; they follow the water in the valley, and we escape." Possibly Odiham, for some reason, may be so favoured; though once, when driving but a few miles away from there, I experienced the worst thunderstorm I was ever in.

Beyond Odiham we struck upon a very pleasant stretch of country which brought us to the pretty village of Basing, and the crumbling ruins of Basing House, the story of the siege and sack of which it is needless to repeat here second-hand. This formerly fine and fortified house is now so ruined that its interest is mainly historic. The church of Basing

is interesting, and possesses some quaint gargoyles. Within it are preserved some helmets and other relics of the siege found when digging about the ruins. In a niche of the west wall is a finely-carved image of the Virgin and Child, said to have been preserved from the Puritan fury by being hidden with ivy purposely trained over it. A clever idea cleverly carried out.

Then again we found ourselves in a region of narrow lanes—hilly and very twisty ones to boot, so that our progress was slow ; often impeded besides by farmers' carts, wagons, and cattle. For once the country lanes were not deserted ; yet the land seemed sparsely inhabited ; but for some cause, in that particular district, the farmers appeared very busy on the road that day. We passed by one or two pretty hamlets and solitary cottages, and that is all that I can remember of the country till we reached Aldermaston with its green meadows and lazy waterways.

Aldermaston is a sleepy spot ; even the streams there hardly seem to have energy to move along ; it is "a village out of any great road," as Clarendon describes it in his *History of the Rebellion.* Possibly the only time it has awakened out of its sleepiness was when the Royalist forces, under Colonel Gage, had a stiff and successful fight with the Parliamentarians there, when the former were on their way to convey sorely-needed supplies to Basing House. This daring dash of Gage's from Oxford to Basing, successfully carried out through a country swarming with the enemy, was a noteworthy exploit. He achieved the

seemingly impossible perhaps because the enemy deemed the deed impossible, and were not sufficiently on the alert. The man who greatly dares often wins. Gage, with much astuteness, boldly declared his intention of relieving Basing House, even to the sending of trustworthy messengers before him, with instructions to provide provisions and accommodation for his troops at certain places on the line of march; all of which was done, and naturally came to the ears of the Parliamentarians, as Gage intended it should. Then Gage quickly and quietly did what he boldly proclaimed he would do—but he went another way. The only trouble he had was with a small party of the Cromwellians at Aldermaston, but the latter, being both weak in numbers and unprepared, were easily overcome.

A few miles beyond Aldermaston found us on the main London and Bath road; a fine open road, but not an interesting one,—at least at the point we emerged upon it. Of necessity we followed this for a mile or two, when, observing an inviting-looking by-road with a sign-post at the corner having "Pangbourne" thereon, we promptly turned up it, as to go forward would have brought us to Reading, and large towns we carefully avoided as far as possible. Pangbourne, though a well-known spot, was preferable to Reading. At any rate Pangbourne was in the country, and picturesque, and Reading was neither. Our lane for a time proved to be uninterestingly straight; I never knew a lane go so straight for so far before, but it was tree-shaded and very pleasant notwithstanding. At last, just beyond the

first bend of the lane, the little hamlet of Tidmarsh was revealed to us. We might have passed it unheeded by, as we had passed many another pretty hamlet that day, had we not chanced to espy an artist there, sitting with his easel in front of him, busily painting an old weather-beaten water-mill,—for a full flowing stream ran alongside our road, gurgling companionably as it glided on, and this drove the big mill wheel.

The sight of the artist and the quaint old mill caused us to promptly pull up. Naturally it was a picturesque spot, or the artist would not have been there; a landscape painter's business is to search out beauty-spots. So we wandered down to the mill, after exchanging greetings with the artist, who kindly showed us his drawing. I think he was rather glad to have a chat with a stranger; for an out-of-door artist, in spite of the interest of his work, unless he paints in company, is apt at times to feel a little lonely—at least an artist, not unknown to fame, once told me so, and told me that when he felt lonely his work suffered, unless it were of a gloomy nature, such as a solitary mountain peak or pass, or a deserted moorland. "To ensure success," he said, "your spirit must be attuned to the spirit of the landscape."

Time passes quickly in pleasant places and in pleasant company. We must have spent over an hour or more at Tidmarsh wandering about the fresh green meadows above the mill, and along a footpath beside the brimming stream, sketching and photographing this choice bit and that, as it took

our fancy; chatting first to the artist, and then to the good-natured miller, who kindly made us free of his little property. I have always found millers to be genial fellows, and so am fond of them. Never yet have I come across a surly miller, and many a merry one have I met. There must surely be some reason for this. Perhaps the hum of a mill is cheering and soothing to the soul; it is to mine, I know. Possibly a miller's business is a steady one, and fairly free from care; and thus he leads an easy, tranquil life, so that the world smiles on him, and he on the world in turn.

> There was a jolly miller once,
> Lived on the river Dee;
> He worked and sung from morn till night:
> No lark more blithe than he,

sings the poet; and when I come to think of it, more than once, when coming unexpectedly upon a miller, I have found him humming a merry tune to the music of his whirling wheels; and a man who sings at his work is the man for me. Did not Henry VIII. once knight a worthy miller because he was "such a jolly good fellow," and settle a thousand marks a year upon him? Or is this but a pleasant fiction? It is the miller of Mansfield I have in mind.

But for a warning note of thunder, I know not how long we might have lingered at this restful spot (solitary enough when the miller had gone inside his mill and the artist was out of sight), lulled to laziness by the dreamy droning of the distant mill, for we had wandered some way

from it; lulled also by the quiet wash of the brook, by the murmuring of the wind amongst the trees and rushes, and by the twittering and the songs of many birds. Country sounds are as refreshing to the ear as country scenes are to the eye. To me it is a joy upon a summer day to lie down at full length upon some grassy bank with closed eyes, so that the sense of hearing may not be disturbed, and just to listen to Nature's soft reposeful melodies.

Sweet 'tis to wander
Through this English land
By mead and orchard copse
And old-world grange,
Lulled by the song
Of brook, and bird, and bee.

Following the thunder came the rain; then we hurried off to the car, put up the hood in record time, and sped away, wholly ignoring the speed limit. The artist, too, we noticed, had sought the shelter of a cottage; for he waved to us from under its porch as we passed by. Now the rain came down in earnest, the thunder rolled loud and long, the lightning flashed, and by the time we reached Pangbourne it was as though a second deluge was in progress. So we pulled up at the first inn we came to, which proved to be "The Elephant"—a new strange title to me, and not nearly so attractive as the good old-fashioned and familiar ones of "The Red (or White) Lion," "The White Hart," "The Crown," "The King's Head," and others that have lingered long, still flourish in the land, and have a pleasant ring about them. Sometimes there is

romance in a name. Now, "The Elephant" has not a romantic sound to me, and it carries no associations with it; it is not even a picturesque animal to put upon a signboard. Give me a bold red lion rampant, as fierce of countenance as the village painter can make him; and if rejoicing in a fresh coat of brilliant vermilion, so much the better—that is a sign worth hanging up and looking at. You can make something of a fierce lion; but of a clumsy elephant, what?

It was now late in the afternoon, and though we had not travelled far that day, so late had we started forth, so had we dallied, here and there, on the way, that evening was approaching; therefore, as the storm seemed settling down to a long innings, we inquired if we could have a room for the night. "You can have a dozen!" exclaimed the landlord; "you are the only guests. The rain has driven all our visitors away; Pangbourne's a fair-weather place." So beneath the sign of "The Elephant" we slept that night, and slept soundly. The inn proved comfortable, mine host obliging, the cooking good; we even discovered a garden in the rear, and a summer-house therein, only the lawn was rain-soaked. The inn deserved a better title.

During the evening I found my way to the Smoke Room, where a blazing fire was. It might storm and bluster as it liked without—that only emphasised the ruddy cheerfulness within. There I discovered seated, solitary, my friend the artist, smoking, and with a glass of toddy close beside him on the table, "just to keep a cold away," he ex-

plained. It appeared, after waiting till he was tired of waiting, he had faced the storm and tramped the two miles from Tidmarsh with such protection as a wind-blown mackintosh afforded. "I'm used to that sort of thing," he said; "I used to paint a lot in Wales, and it can rain there when in the mood. Many a day have I been wet through, but never a bit the worse for it." Then I remembered that I too, long years ago, had spent a month in North Wales sketching, staying at a little unpretentious inn, then the head-quarters of a small band of enthusiastic artists; and I recalled the jovial evenings I spent there, in an atmosphere of good-fellowship and tobacco smoke, the enlightening talk we indulged in about art, and the jokes we cracked. A right merry crew were we; may I never fall into worse company. So I mentioned their names, and asked my friend if ever he had met any of them. He knew them all, for he too was in Wales at work about that time. "Let me see!" exclaimed he; "why, that must have been over twenty years ago." It was. Alas! that time should fly so.

"Where are they now, and how are they getting on?" I queried. Then I went over their names again. To the first on the list came the laconic rejoinder, "Oh, he's dead!" To the second, "He's dead too!" The third had gone to join the great majority, I learnt. The fourth had drunk himself into a lunatic asylum. The fifth had disappeared, no one knew where. "And you are alive to tell the tale," I remarked. "Yes, but I should not be if I had remained in Wales," came in reply. "It's

all very well in the summer time—if you sell your pictures. It's the winter that does for one there when it rains at times for weeks together. Then you can't paint, there's no amusement, it's not over-cheerful sitting in a tiny cottage with a window about the size of a pocket-handkerchief, and a poor painter cannot afford better quarters; so for the sake of company he goes to the inn; there's little else to do but watch the rain; and when at the inn he drives dulness away with a glass or two, and then he takes to drinking, more or less, the whole day, and then he disappears from the scene. That's a true story. Wales in the summer is glorious, but God help a poor artist who has to spend his winters there. I came south in time, and now I paint on the river, or in Devon, and so I am alive." As far as my memory serves, I have repeated our conversation without an altered word.

Then my artist friend ordered another glass of toddy, "just to make quite sure I don't catch cold," and filled his pipe for the fourth time. "This weather reminds me of Wales," said he; "but to return to a more cheerful subject, have you ever heard the stock riddle here, 'Why is the river at Pangbourne like a drover's dog?'" I gave it up, not being good at riddles. The answer is, "Because it runs between Oxon and Berks." After that I thought it was time for bed.

CHAPTER VIII

A chat with a landscape painter—The teasings of the weather—Where the curfew is tolled—A land lighthouse—Horseback travels—The "Port Way"—Wantage—The monk as a sculptor—A spot to remember—A relic of Canute?—A land of traditions—A breezy drive—A lonely road—The wind as a musician—A whistling weathercock.

My chat with the artist had one effect upon the fortunes of our tour; it set me thinking about North Wales, that delightful land of mountains, wooded glens, and rocky rivers, and I felt a sudden longing to see it again. We had not been there for years, for the familiar and famous shrines, before which the tripper bows his head, have no special allurements for us. Fame is a fatal gift when beautiful scenery is concerned; it brings the railway along lonely and lovely valleys and even up the mountains; it brings the big and assertive hotel, the modern builder with his ugly lodging-houses, the thronged char-à-banc, the fashionable tourist and the noisy tripper, and from these it is hard to escape. The artist and angler do not count, for they are quiet and picturesque beings, in harmony with their surroundings, and moreover pleasant company both at the inn and on the way. Now, the mountains demand solitude, not a crowd, least of all a noisy

crowd. But then I remembered it was June, and the tourist season had not begun, there would be ample room for us at the inn, and above all we should be able to enjoy the scenery undisturbed by the professional sightseer. Hitherto we had only visited North Wales in the height of the holiday season; out of it the land had a new meaning to us, a land of old romance it still was; only a few happy fishermen were there, and a stray traveller or two,—but I am a little previous.

Said I to my wife, coming fresh from my chat with the artist, "I've got an idea. Long years ago we went sketching in North Wales; that was in August, when the country was overrun with tourists. I know we were but tourists too—no matter; but what do you say to going there again in the absence of so much other company?" "Agreed," responded she, after a moment's consideration; "we may as well go there as anywhere else; besides I know when you've got an idea in your head you mean to carry it out. A wife is but clay in the hands of her husband." "A *good* wife," I added; "you have forgotten the needful adjective." I prided myself on my diplomatic rejoinder. So to Wales it was settled we would go. We would not trouble as to the route there, but decided simply to drive in a north-westerly direction, taking the lane, the by-way, or the high road, as best served our purpose. Our course might not be very direct, but so long as we eventually arrived where we wished, the directness or indirectness of our way troubled us not.

The next morning was gloriously fine. The

storm had spent itself and left us a cloudless sky, deeply blue above, and a refreshed and rain-washed world below. Like a pebble which, when wet, shows all its many tints, unrevealed when dry, so the moist-laden landscape abounded in colour, and so pure and clear was the atmosphere that the far-away hills seemed almost close at hand. Sharply silhouetted against the sky-line as they were, the distance was deceptive, looking miles nearer than usual. I have noticed this deception of distance in the thin atmosphere of California, where, to my unaccustomed eyes, a mountain peak, looking but an easy day's stage away, yet took me three honest days' hard riding to reach it. The moist air of England lends the charm of mystery to the horizon, and mystery makes things seem remote; still you know the horizon is get-at-able during daylight with a motor car; it cannot evade you. To the eye the horizon is far off; it is space-expressing, but you realise that you can conquer it. You are master of the distance, it is not the master of you.

Some one somewhere says, who or where I cannot now remember, that "it takes three foul days to breed a good one in England, but when the good one does come, so perfect is it, that the price is well worth paying." That day was one of the perfect ones; had we the making of it we could not have done better. Like the famous Samuel Pepys of *Diary* renown, we "awoke betimes" to find the sunshine streaming in through our windows, the birds without, having apparently already breakfasted on the proverbial early worm—hard lines on the

worm for early rising!—were chanting their cheerful matins. The morning was too ideal to be cooped within walls longer than needful for breakfast and to pack our belongings previous to departure.

We took the road leading straight forward from our inn without inquiring where it went, and found ourselves following the course of the river, driving in a north-westerly direction just as we desired. So we came to Streatley, much beloved by river men; but we felt in a roving mood that morning, and not inclined to linger in well-known spots, however attractive those spots might be. After Streatley we struck upon an open, down-like country, a country of wide views and bracing breezes. All around us stretched a spacious landscape, with no worrying detail to disturb its breadth, a bleak and undulating grassy upland with a circling distance, that morning beautifully blue.

There is a certain pace at which the country can be best enjoyed, and that pace depends upon the scenery. To loiter on a lonely moorland, where one mile is much like another, and with a road stretching far ahead in dull monotony, where all is revealed and nothing uncertain, is apt to cause weariness; then speed and the rush of wind in one's face is inspiriting, a tonic for body and mind. So over that open upland we sped along, fresh horizons ever opening up, hills beyond hills "rolling in the blue." At Blewbury we discovered a pretty and sequestered village with a fine old church. Our artist had spoken to us of the charms of Blewbury, of its thatched cottages, its orchards, and its waterways.

It looks like a village that has seen better days, but whose mild prosperity has departed, probably never to return again. After the invention of the railway, when the coaches, post-chaises, and goods wagons were driven off the road, Blewbury had to depend upon its own resources. It now grows water-cresses for the London market, and excellent water-cresses too, but it is not a very exciting or a profitable industry.

In an age when the ugly trail of the modern builder is over the land, such primitive and picturesque spots as Blewbury have a doubly pleasant look. The wealthy man adorns the walls of his modern mansion with paintings of such peaceful and pretty villages, though he seldom troubles to go in search of the originals. Few people realise beauty till an artist has translated it for them. A picture by Turner or David Cox arouses their enthusiasm, but the fount from which these artists drew their inspirations leaves them strangely cold. Beautiful pictures are prized possessions ; they are the magicians of our walls that transport us to delightful scenes, to quiet hamlets and sleepy hollows without the trouble of travel, without even the trouble of thinking much.

The curfew bell, we were told, is still rung at Blewbury ; and long may it continue to be rung, for an old custom, once abolished, is generally abolished for ever. Many years ago it is recorded that one bleak winter's night a solitary horseman lost himself in a snowstorm whilst traversing the dreary downs above the village, and was nearly frozen to death, but was guided to Blewbury and safety by the sound

of the curfew bell, so it has not been rung there altogether in vain. According to ancient tradition, the ringing of the curfew gave the time when ghosts might "walk" the earth until the first cock-crow of the following morning, a curious bit of information I picked up on the road.

In past days, when men oftentimes journeyed on horseback, at many lonely spots bells were not infrequently rung on foggy nights for the benefit of belated travellers, and here and there, on wide open heaths and desolate moors, lighted beacons were employed to guide the wayfarer on his way. At the remote, old-world Yorkshire village of Bainbridge, in Wensleydale, a horn was blown (I believe, indeed, that it still is blown—it certainly was till quite recently) at ten o'clock every night, from the Feast of the Holy Rood to Shrove-tide, for the guidance of lost travellers in the wild and wooded country around, a large cow-horn being employed. In the medieval times people appear mostly to have used Saints' Days and the Feasts and Festivals of the Church as dates. I wonder how many people of to-day could fix the date of the Feast of the Holy Rood? When touring in Lincolnshire we had Dunston Pillar pointed out to us, a tall structure visible from far away; this was originally built to serve as a land lighthouse, and a light was kept burning there all night as a beacon to travellers over the extensive heath around.

Now that we have decent, if somewhat intricate, roads, though we often complain about them, the horseman with packs to carry his luggage is never

or very rarely met with, yet it is a form of touring that has its advantages, for the horseman is not confined to the road. Some friends of mine made up a party and travelled about England in this manner, and they averred that the experiment was a great success. But there is always some risk of a horse going lame; truly a motor car may break down, but provided the owner takes the trouble to understand his engines, a break-down may generally be set right without greater inconvenience than a little delay; at least that is my experience, after several years of motoring and many hundreds of miles of motor touring.

After Blewbury the first village we noted on our way, or to be exact, a little to the left of our road, was East Hendred; a village with a ruined monastery, and of much charm and antiquarian interest. Here is Hendred House, with a curiously massive private chapel attached, in which chapel it is claimed that the services of the Roman Catholic Church have been performed uninterruptedly for six eventful centuries, and also during which long period the sacred light before the altar has burned continuously. Hendred House is the home of the Eystons, a family devoted to the "ancient faith," and directly descended from Sir Thomas More. Though it makes a pretty tradition, I cannot understand how the offices of the Roman Catholic Church could have been uninterruptedly performed in the chapel, or how the sacred light before the altar could always have been kept burning, even granting the possibility that the chapel escaped the fury

of the Puritan fanatics during the Cromwellian days, for it is a matter of history that when the army of the Prince of Orange passed near by, a portion of his troops invaded East Hendred and pillaged the chapel, "supping out of the chalice, and taking away some of the church stuffe," of which latter they made a bonfire. It is hardly probable that these rough soldiers would have allowed the sacred light to remain burning in the chapel they desecrated.

Passing next through a pleasant stretch of country, we arrived at the ancient town of Wantage. I find that the road we traversed from Blewbury to Wantage is marked on my map "Port Way," and that another and higher road to the south, running along the top of the downs, in curving parallel to it, is marked Icknield Way, locally called the Ridgeway. Of the ancient Icknield Way, that led right across England from Suffolk in the east to Exeter in the west, I know the story; of the Port Way I know nothing; indeed, I was unaware of the existence of such a road until I discovered it plainly so marked on my Ordnance map, nor can I find any allusion to it in any reference book in my little library. Possibly I might learn all about it by going to the British Museum and consulting some dusty tomes there, and then I might write eruditely upon the matter, professing a knowledge I do not possess, but I prefer to honestly confess my ignorance. There are some people who appear to know everything—I do not profess to be one of them,—people who possess a deadly desire to instruct others, to air their superior knowledge. I

recently heard of a self-made man (the more honour to him for that) who, when addressing a political meeting in his village, proud to display his learning, quoted the Latin saying, "Fiat justitia, ruat coelum," which, for the benefit of his unenlightened listeners, he translated thus: "Let justice be done, though the ceiling fall"!

The ancient town of Wantage did not look so ancient as we expected; it looks (if I may be allowed the expression) middle-aged, not old. It has a clean and neat appearance; its streets were almost deserted when we were there, and the few people we saw loitering about seemed to be contentedly doing nothing. "A quiet old town, this Wantage of yours," we ventured to remark to one of its inhabitants, who was lazily watching our car as we pulled up to inspect the fine statue of King Alfred that adorns, or is supposed to adorn, its market-place. I write "fine statue," because I am told it is considered so, but, personally, I do not admire it. I have not yet acquired the easy art, guide-book in hand, of admiring anything to order, or because others do. The statue represents King Alfred meekly standing with a battle-axe in one hand and a charter in the other. Now meekness is not a virtue I associate with that king, or his times. To my mind, the figure lacks inspiration and vigour. To satisfy me, a statue needs the carved stone or cast bronze to live; not merely to be chiselled, or cast, into human shape. I crave for

> The stone that breathes and struggles,
> The bronze that seems to speak.

The inanimate made animate. Those rare craftsmen, the monkish sculptors, gave us this, as witness the grinning demons and weird animals, unknown to natural history, of their grotesque gargoyles, that one and all verily look as though they might drop down from their places on the church walls and towers, where they so long have been, and forthwith roam about the land. The modern statue of King Alfred stands, we were informed, on the spot where the ancient market-cross stood, which latter was erected in 1580. Report says, probably with truth, this was destroyed by the Parliamentarian soldiers under Waller. It appears to have been an exceptionally fine cross, "having superstitious images graven thereon"; so it follows that the Puritans made short work of it, not even allowing the harmless steps to remain.

I was given to understand by the lazy-looking inhabitant I addressed, that though the town was quiet enough just then, it was all bustle and life on a market day. "You should see it then," said he, "why, you would fancy you were in London town!" It was pleasant to find so much local pride existing, though the crowd of burly sun-tanned farmers, the country conveyances, and the cattle one finds in a busy market town upon a market day, is about as unlike a London crowd as a crowd could be. I wonder why rural folk so generally call London, London town? Several times, too, when asking if I were in such and such a village, I have been informed, "You be in the town!" Emphasis being thrown on the last word.

But for the accident of King Alfred being born of old in the little town, I doubt if the name of Wantage would be known out of the county. It has had fame thrust upon it. Nor would, I imagine, Stratford-on-Avon, though a larger place, be a name familiar throughout the English-speaking world, but for the fact that Shakespeare came into the world there. Whoever would have heard of sleepy Somersby, but that it was Tennyson's birthplace? Such is the power of personality.

An artist once showed me a lovely little valley in the North Country, a valley as beautiful as grey rocks, waving, many-tinted woods, a clear-water river tumbling and foaming over its boulder-strewn bed and crossed by many an ancient bridge, with a background of shapely hills, could make a valley. A valley he had worked in for years and yet had not exhausted its beauties; indeed, he confessed to me that he had kept house and brought up a family upon the pictures he had painted there. When I asked him how it was that so lovely a valley had not got into the guide-books, and had consequently escaped the attentions of the sight-seeing tourist, he briefly replied, "I suppose because no one of importance has been born there, and happily no poet to sing its praises." There are still some beauty spots in England that the guide-book compiler has not discovered; and I have no intention, by even an indirect hint, to help him, perchance, to discover, and so to spoil, them. Better that this book remained unwritten than to do this.

Beyond Wantage we drove into a level country

of hedgerowed fields, and lost ourselves in a tangle of by-roads and indirect lanes that appeared to lead nowhere in particular. At last, however, we turned up at Pusey Park. The manor of Pusey, if past history is to be relied upon, was bestowed upon the family of that name by King Canute, and is held by tenure of a horn, a large ox-horn mounted in silver, and having a band round it inscribed, "I, King Knute, geve Wyllyam Pewse thys horne to hold by thy Londe." I believe that certain antiquaries have been bold enough to dispute the genuineness of the horn, believing it to be a copy of the original one, not the history of the curious gift of the manor, which is a different thing; but then there always are some hard-headed and hard-hearted antiquaries who love disputing, purely, it seems to me, for the pleasure of so doing. However, in 1681, during a law-suit for the recovery of the manor brought by Charles Pusey in the Court of Chancery before Lord Chancellor Jeffreys, the horn was produced in Court, and after careful examination was "admitted, and proved to be the identical horn by which, as by a Charter, King Canute had conveyed the manor of Pusey seven hundred years before." Truly that was a less critical age than this; still, the horn was pronounced as genuine by the Court of Chancery then. At least, if the horn be a forgery, it is a very ancient one, and respectable on that account, if a forgery can ever be respectable. The story of the grant of the manor is both curious and picturesque, and the genuineness of the horn is not improbable.

Near to Pusey, within two miles, in fact, is Cher-

bury Camp, and tradition asserts that Canute had a palace there. And though tradition is often wrong, yet it is sometimes right. The history of the gift of land close at hand by Canute, though it proves nothing, yet lends an air to the probability of his having a palace at Cherbury. However, all certainty in the matter is lost in the dim mists of antiquity; nothing now about it can be proved or disproved, argue as the learned may. Such stoutly held traditions, even if wrong, make one realise how old is this historic England of ours, for they deal, not with places alone, but with real personages who lived in it nearly a thousand years nearer the birth of Christ than we do in this our day; and out of our past our present grew. We are still making history; the present will in its turn become the past. I wonder what our descendants will think of it? Truly we cannot view our age in the proper perspective. Time ever casts a halo of romance over the never-returning long ago, so it may be that generations still unborn will write fondly and speak wistfully of these days as the good old times, as theirs may seem less desirable. I would give something to be able to return to earth a couple of centuries hence, just to see how the old world jogs on then. We have progressed since poor Bruno, who was born too early, suffered death by burning for boldly asserting that the world turns round the sun. Three hundred years back a man was burnt at the stake for telling the truth! To-day

> We scatter the mists that enclose us,
> Till the seas are ours, and the lands;

Till the quivering ether knows us,
And carries our quick commands.

From the blaze of the sun's bright glory
We sift each ray of light;
We steal from the stars their story
Across the dark spaces of night.

But beyond the bright searchlights of science,
Out of sight of the windows of sense,
Old riddles still bid us defiance,
Old questions of Why? and Whence?

Will the centuries to come still leave those old and ever-repeated questions unanswered? I have become discursive again; I am always wandering off the road; but there is something about the quiet countryside that impels introspection, for when all around is so peaceful one has opportunity to think. Indeed, without distractions one is bound to think, or vegetate, and I prefer to think.

From Pusey we followed first, for a time, a lane, then a short space of high road, then a by-way; and so we changed from one to the other just as they inclined to a north-westerly direction, for which we steered our course as well as we could. But like a sailing-ship in adverse winds we had to do a lot of tacking. In due course we crossed the youthful Thames at Tadpole Bridge, a pretty spot. So narrow is the stream there that I did not imagine it could be the Thames until I had consulted my map, for it was no more like that famous river of the lower reaches than the child is like the man. I fancy the stream in these parts is too confined and too reedy for comfortable boating, so it is given

over to the angler and the artist; and if it abounds in fish as it does in picturesque bits, the former should have good sport, though the fish be coarse.

Then we followed a rather rough by-road that gradually ascended through a healthy-looking, open stone country, where we happily escaped from the fevered red of brick buildings. Eventually we found ourselves high up in the world, and quite unexpectedly on a well-macadamised and broad high road stretching far away to the right and to the left of us, with low, grey stone walls for fences in place of the familiar hedges. We had manifestly struck upon a main and important thoroughfare, for it had a business look about it, even though at the time deserted by man, and not a vehicle of any kind was in sight. Our map revealed to us the fact that this was the old coaching and mail road from London to Gloucester—a road with a set purpose, which was to reach a far-away destination without dallying on the way. From the little local towns and villages below it held itself unconcernedly aloof; not a yard out of its course would it deviate for their convenience.

As the road led along the top of the hills and afforded wide panoramas on either hand over the vast rolling country below, we elected to follow it for a while. The day was hot, and the cool breezes that swept over the uplands were very welcome. I fancy, for a time, that we enjoyed those fresh and fragrant breezes more even than the spacious scenery; they were as exhilarating as champagne, without the hurt or the cost of it. Some people

travel for change of air; you get plenty of such changes on a motor tour.

This erst busy highway seemed strangely deserted as we drove along it; not a soul did we see or meet for miles, not even a dog, nor the proverbial fowl that always, at the last moment, flies under the wheels of the car. The road was originally constructed for through travel, with no regard for local requirements; and who nowadays makes long journeys by road except the motorist? And no motorist was in evidence that day, possibly because the road is not on any favourite touring beat, and possibly because it was not the tourist season. But whatever the cause, we had the highway and the joy of it all to ourselves; and, selfishly, we were not sorry to have it so. There is a certain indescribable fascination in being solitary travellers on a lonely road, for there is always an intangible sense of romance about things that tell of man and yet are deserted by him. A ruined abbey, grey with years; a crumbling castle, graphic reminder of the feudal days; a forsaken manor-house going to slow decay, in like manner appeal to the imagination, and possess this unfailing poetic charm.

Often have I crossed the ever-charming Cotswold hills, and never yet have I failed to find, even on the hottest summer day, a more or less bracing breeze blowing over them. There the homeless wind seems like some lost spirit, seeking rest and finding none; and when it blows strong, it makes strange, weird, wild music amongst the crevices of the loose stone walls that line the road, and at

times, like the gust of wind in the expunged stanza of *The Ancient Mariner*, it "half whistles and half groans." Many are the tunes, that most ancient of all musicians, the wild wind, plays, now soft and low, now loud and strong; but I think I like it best when it sings amongst the woods a song that imitates the sounding sea, and whenever I hear that song, however far inland I may be, I seem to hear the distant waves surging on some rocky shore. The wind is a great companion of the lonely traveller, though he may not always realise the fact. A friend of mine who lived for long beside a tumbling, splashing mountain stream, told me that when he came to a new abode in a lowland country, for many nights he could not sleep, he so missed "the living companionship of the laughing, tumbling water," the quietude of the placid lowlands was absolutely oppressive to him; such is the companionship of sound, a thing not to be confused with the disturbing noise of towns.

When I come to think of it, after the unfailing topic of the weather, the country folks' favourite subject of conversation is frequently the wind, the way of it, the mood of it, and whether it will bring rain or fine. "I don't like to hear the wind a-talking like that, it bodes nobody any good," exclaimed an aged sexton to me one morning as I was inspecting his village church, when half a gale was blowing around and chattering as it blew. Another man once said to me as the wind howled about his cottage eerily one winter's night, "I don't like to hear it; when the wind screams like that it

means that some poor sailors are being drowned at sea. I do wish as how it would stop." On Salisbury Plain I was told by a shepherd (and what a shepherd does not know about local weather is not worth knowing) that whenever the wind blew steadily from the south for three successive days, however fine the weather at the time might be, thunderstorms and heavy rains were sure to come. Then there is the story told of the country parson who was requested by one of his farmer parishioners to pray for rain, upon which his clerk exclaimed, "It baint no good, sir, to pray for rain when the wind is in the present quarter." A curious use was made of the wind by the monks of old, whose quaint conceit it was, occasionally, to construct a weathercock provided with huge whistles, which sounded whenever a moderate wind blew, and when the wind blew strong the music could be heard for far around. One of these ancient weathercocks, said to be six hundred years old, still crowns the tower of Ottery St. Mary's church in Devon. This has been restored, and can be heard whistling merrily there, just as it did long ages ago. In fishing villages these whistling weathercocks served the purpose of acquainting the fishermen during the night time, by the volume of sound they gave forth, whether or not the sea would be too rough in the morning for them to go out.

CHAPTER IX

Over the breezy Cotswolds—A desolate spot—Wise sayings—Seeing broadly and thinking broadly—Grey stone Jacobean houses—Old-time interiors—The art of the craftsman—The former perils of the road—A gruesome story—Murdered yet alive!—A haunted sign-post—A quaint and ancient town.

As we drove along that exposed ridge, the wind made a mighty harp of the telegraph wires that followed the highway faithfully for as far as the eye could trace, and the buzz of the wind upon the wires was like the hum of innumerable bees, a sound that filled the air and broke pleasantly the brooding silence of the hills. The long line of telegraph posts lessening to the dim horizon, posts that succeeded one another in apparently endless succession, rising and falling with the undulations of the road, led the eye far away into the dreamy distance; a vast study in vanishing perspective.

In the pre-railway age it must have been a trying drive in the winter time for the outside passengers on the dissipated and fast travelling night coach when crossing that high and bleak stretch of country, exposed as they were to every wind that blows. Even on that sunshiny June day there was a touch of keenness in the air that caused us to wrap our rugs tightly around us, and we were not

sorry to call a halt under the shelter of some storm-bent, stunted trees that made a brave struggle to exist on that windy height. Elsewhere, for miles, the trees had given up the almost hopeless struggle. Close to the spot we espied an ancient, and apparently deserted, toll-house, a relic of the days when the road traveller had to pull up, ever and again, for the luxury of paying a toll and of being delayed. I remember those times of my youth, and how, when touring with horses and limited to distance, many a day my tolls altogether cost me more than my dinner, and over-frequently the toll-keeper had no change ready by him. But men appeared to have more leisure then, for speed was not the supreme god they worshipped, and how quiet were the country roads, and you always felt sure of a room at your inn. Sometimes in this hurrying and striving age I find myself sighing for those restful days of old that are now but a memory. I trow the world will never again be the peaceful place to live in it was then.

The bracing air made us famishingly hungry. Fortunately with a provisioned luncheon basket aboard, we had only to stop when we were hungry and to take our refreshment without waiting for an inn to materialise, or without waiting for our repast to be brought to us. And what is more trying to a really hungry man than to have to wait some unknown time for his meal?

> No need was there for maid or man,
> When we put up . . .
> At God's green caravanserai.

I know not how it was, unless hunger had made my vision careless of my surroundings,—I think it must have been that, for as an old proverb has it, "a hungry man has no eyes,"—but for some reason or another, it was not until our modest meal was over and my pipe of peace alight, that I espied, not far along the road ahead, a weather-beaten, stone-built inn, grey and old, standing alone and looking sadly forlorn. No other house in all the wide sweep of upland around was visible, excepting the old toll cottage, if my memory serves me well. The inn had such a pathetic look, I felt quite sorry for it, as I would for a deserving man who had come down in the world through no fault of his own. Now when you feel sorry for a thing you take an interest in it, so I strolled along to the lonely hostel and opening its closed door found myself in its deserted bar, and after knocking loudly twice, a smiling woman came to me. The glass of ale I had was good and clear and cool; but I had not come for that. I came to gather something of the history of the inn, and to solve the mystery of its existence there to-day in such a desolate land and on a road where travellers seemed so few. It looked like one of those solitary inns of which strange tales are told, and not always untruthful ones, of roguish landlords in league with the highwaymen and of murdered guests. If you travel far enough in England you are sure in time to come upon one of these legended and lonely hostels; you can no more escape from them than you can from Cromwell's inexhaustible cannon-balls, or the inevitable haunted house.

But though it looked the part to perfection, the "New Barn Inn," as it is called, has had a very proper and uneventful past. The only romance about the place was what I put into it; and this is what I learnt from the landlady who waited upon me. In the old days it was an inn, then it became a farm-house, but her husband thought he might possibly profitably combine the business of an innkeeper with that of a farmer; hence the experiment under the new conditions of road traffic. How it had succeeded was not revealed to me, nor did I care to inquire. Then I was introduced and handed over to the civil-spoken and quiet-mannered landlord, and found the rooms that waited the hoped-for guests to be unexpectedly large and airy, and plainly though sufficiently furnished. The house was sweet and clean, and marvellous to relate, all the windows were wide open, the blinds up, so that the rooms were flooded by the sunshine and flushed by the abundant pure air blowing in. Little wonder that the carpets and curtains had a faded look; but sunshine spells health, so the faded look of those rooms pleased me. I knew a man who built himself a lordly dwelling, but he built it facing north, so that the sunshine should not come into his stately rooms and fade his beautiful belongings and his treasured pictures. I ventured to remark to him, "Where the sunshine does not come the doctor does." I fear I am too much given to quoting these old saws; I find I am always making notes of the many I pick up on the road from the various country folk I meet; but there is often much hidden

wisdom in these despised wise sayings, and the best of them are worth preserving. And into that sunless house the doctor was a frequent visitor. So in this instance the wisdom of the many was not at fault.

I was almost tempted, though there were some hours of daylight left, to stop and spend the night at this remote and reposeful spot, where all things seemed at rest except the restless wind, to sample the simple country life and fare of a Cotswold farmer, to sleep in the tonic and refreshing upland air, to enjoy the tranquillity, and the rare experience, of being so far away from the thronged outer world, far away in feeling if not in actual distance. There at any rate was peace, a peace almost as profound as that of the tropic sea; all around were the silent rounded downs, like the billows of some gigantic ocean suddenly arrested and converted into land, downs rolling into space beneath the domed stillness of the sky. So our eyes, unfettered by bounding lines, could take their fill of the wide expanse of earth and air. From there we looked calmly down upon the worrying world, and wondered why it worried so about trivial things; we seemed to be lifted above trifles. We saw things broadly, so we thought broadly; just as it is difficult to think ignobly in the company of great men.

At some other time, I made a mental note, I would find my way to that remote inn and beneath its shelter snatch a brief respite from care. It seemed an ideal spot for a rest cure, for there was nothing whatever to do there but rest; a duller

place to depress the dullard could scarcely be found, with not even a morning paper to be had. And, when you go touring in England, to escape from the daily paper is a feat more difficult of accomplishment than many would imagine. Since the journey was finished, often have my thoughts wandered back with a sense of pleasure impossible to define to that lone inn and the vastness of the bare landscape around it. It might not impress others as it impressed me, for the emotions that a place creates in the mind are a matter of individual idiosyncrasy, and they come unsought; it is the mind that translates what the eye sees. I have known two artists paint the same scene, from practically the same spot on the same day, so that the conditions of the light and weather were unaltered, yet their interpretations of the subject before them differed as widely as their personalities. The one saw poetry and mystery in the scene, and these he put into his picture; the other simply recorded bare facts, for he had no imagination in his soul. The poetry of a place lies as much in the observer as in the place itself. "I can see nought in it," exclaimed a north countryman to me one day in respect of a crumbling old castle that charmed me greatly; "it's nought but a ruin." It is the romance within us that "lends enchantment to the scene."

Proceeding on our way, we presently deserted the high road and turned down a lane that led us into the heart of a sequestered and hilly country. We had grown tired of the smooth, uneventful

highway. "Il suit toujours le grand chemin, le grand chemin, et ne va pas chercher midi à quatorze heures," writes Molière of one of his characters. I would not have this said of me. Great is the fascination of exploring a fresh country with the ever-eager anticipation of finding something fresh there. And what a delightful Columbus-like thrill of pleasure comes over you when you do chance to make an interesting discovery in, to you, an unknown world. Though we made no noteworthy discoveries that afternoon, the feeling that we might at any moment do so lent an added charm and spice to the ordinary pleasures of the road. We contentedly motored on, leaving all else to chance, as it were; we let the good things come to us, we did not deliberately go in search of them,—how could we, not knowing what was in store for us?

It was a pleasant land we passed through, a bit of genuine old England; there, in the very heart of the Cotswolds, we chanced upon many an ancient stone-built home of the Jacobean days, and some of earlier date. The old Cotswold houses always delight me with their look of solid strength and picturesque repose; they are simply designed, yet always dignified, and do not depend upon would-be ornamental detail for effect, but upon good proportion and bold outline, which satisfies the eye when either close at hand or at a distance. Indeed, the chief ornamentation of them is confined to their entrance doorways, where the old-time builder allowed himself a little scope to express his art feeling by indulging in a bit of simple stone

carving ; and here too the iron craftsman displayed his skill in his finely shaped and wrought hinges, knockers, and bell-pulls. And sometimes on their walls we find a quaint sun-dial to tell the time, or a graceful weathercock to show the way of the wind, and occasionally a big bell-turret on the roof. To me the great charm of these houses is that they seem like homes to be lived in and enjoyed ; for how homelike they look with their stacks of clustering chimneys, their many deep-mullioned windows, and their generous high pitched roofs of grey stone slats, no two slats being alike in shape or size or tint. Moreover, these roofs encourage the growth of golden and silvery lichen, which glorify them with their rich colours. To-day we appear to have forgotten the importance of the roof, that expresses the shelter a house gives to its owner.

Those men of old "builded better than they knew," they had not learnt their craft in an office with rule and paper, but out-of-doors in actual work. At a glance you realise that the exteriors of their houses are the genuine outcome of internal requirements, so where a window was wanted, small or large, there a window was placed ; where a chimney was needed, there a chimney uprose ; never did it enter into their thoughts to sacrifice comfort within by seeking a monotonous and slavish uniformity without. So an irregular picturesqueness of building came naturally.

With my small smattering of architectural knowledge, I should imagine that the Cotswold houses are a type to themselves ; yet they are essentially

A TUDOR FIREPLACE.

English, as English as roast beef and plum-pudding. They are all built of local material, so they smack of the soil, and look as though they had grown where they stand. Were I to build a house for myself, I should take one of these delightful old farm-houses as a pattern, for they possess an unobtrusive charm that eludes the clever modern architect. I have lived in one for a time, and afterwards found it difficult to reconcile myself to an ordinary modern house, though comfortable and convenient enough — but in comparison, oh! so commonplace. How I missed the wide and hospitable ingle-nook wherein I sat smoking and chatting at nights with my host, or where when alone I read a favourite author in peace, or drowsily watched the roaring wood fire upon the hearth, content to do nothing more. I could never tear myself away from that ingle-nook, and never felt quite happy till I had faithfully copied it in my own home. In that ancient house, whenever I went from one room to another, I seemed to be stepping into a fresh picture. I love an old house as I love an old friend; to me there seems to be a haunting sweetness about it, a sense of peacefulness that enters into my very soul. I always feel, I hardly think it is wholly imagination on my part, that those who live in old houses from choice and for the love of them are themselves the most lovable of men.

The traveller in the Cotswolds ever and again is greeted with visions of delightful old-time homes, but, as a rule, it is only the exterior of these he sees, for the stranger in that pleasant land may not have

the coveted opportunity of obtaining a glimpse of their homelike and interesting interiors. I have therefore been tempted to give two photographs of these, one showing an ancient Tudor fireplace before which I have often sat and mused, even to the forgetting of the century I was in, for amidst such old-world surroundings, at times when in a dreamy mood, the past seems more real than the present. The other photograph is of a quaint and comfortable living-room. I like that old term living-room, and so I use it. The photographs reveal, I trust, something of the picturesque charm of these ancient chambers, and as the photographic lens does not romance, the representations have the advantage of truthfulness, no cunning or invention of the artist's pencil has helped their picturesqueness. Look at the illustration of the living-room; what a cosy, comfortable, and, I venture to add, what an artistic look this room has; what a friendly, take-your-ease air there is about it! It is not so grand that you need hesitate to enter it, though clad in an old faded shooting coat and heavy boots, and yet it is dignified enough for the reception of a duke. That is the sort of room for me. An artist might sit down there and forthwith paint a real picture of what was before him without disturbing or arranging anything—indeed, I took the photograph of the room with the furniture and other odds and ends about just as they chanced to be all carelessly ordered, even the bowl of flowers was on the table, and the wine-glass (of old English glass that a collector might envy and that tells its own story) was

AN OLD-FASHIONED ROOM.

accidentally left on the corner of it. When I took the photograph I felt I could not alter anything for the better, even had I a mind to do so. Though I have often striven to take a pleasing photograph of a modern room and its surroundings, never have I been successful in the attempt. To make a picture, the camera must have a picture before it.

As to the ancient furniture of good English oak, of which wood Cobbett (though I should hardly quote him as a sterling authority on such a matter) says the furniture of an Englishman's house always ought to be, how pleasingly solid and substantial it looks, the heaviest man might plump himself down on the settle or the chairs in security. Without the needful cushions, I grant the settle would look bare and uncomfortable in use; but with the soft, loose cushions about, that you can adjust to your own liking, it is in reality the perfection of ease. And how much better and more healthy this arrangement of loose cushions is than the usual stuffed sofa, that collects the dust which can never be wholly removed in the once-a-year spring overhaul. With the old-fashioned settle the loose cushions can readily and quickly be taken out of doors every morning and beaten free of the previous day's dust, and so be kept ever sweet and clean. And how the good old furniture lasts, and how at home it looks in an old house: the "wood carpenter," as he called himself, who made these chairs and tables so shapely and so strong, had no idea of a fashion in furniture changing continually, he thought in generations, not in years.

"By hammer and hand shall all things stand," and the ancient craftsman wrought "by hammer and hand"; and so proud was he of his productions that he frequently carved the year of their making upon them, as the builder did upon his houses. The big factory where goods are turned out wholesale by machinery was not thought of then. Now a machine has no brains, no feelings, so the articles it turns out have a smooth, uninteresting finish, they are not imbued with the personality of the hand maker, and they lack the subtle charm of it. I almost fancy that the word manufacture has lost its original meaning, for when I hear of manufactured goods, I always think of machinery and steam; yet the word manufacture, I learn from my dictionary, means hand made, being derived from *manus*, the hand, and *factura*, a making.

Driving over the hilly, bracing Cotswolds, a rough and tumble country (but I like my scenery so when I have a motor to do the climbing), we found plenty to feast our eyes upon without bewildering them with too many minor details. Here, at least, man has beautified the land with his buildings, and the fussy, rushing railway hardly disturbs its ancient peace. Now we dropped down into a sheltered valley, now we rose to the top of a windy ridge, there was no dull monotony about our road; the Cotswold hills are of no great elevation, still the Cotswold roads manage to do a lot of stiff honest climbing. We did not consult our map on the way, but I remember we passed through a quaint village or two, and a grey old town on the ridge of a lonely

down, without stopping to inquire their names, for we were in a lazy mood that afternoon; content to enjoy our leisurely progress through the old-world land, just as when going through a gallery of landscape paintings, I often prefer to calmly look upon the pictures without disturbing my quiet pleasure therein by consulting the catalogue.

After a time we found ourselves on the very top of the hills at a desolate spot, where four roads met, just one of those spots where, in his day, a seventeenth-century writer said "good people lose their ill-kept purses." That the perils of the road were real in those old days may be gathered from the fact that Burke was "held up" by two highwaymen on Finchley Common; that he confessed he never took a journey without expecting to be robbed; and when eventually he was waylaid, he merely expressed surprise at his good fortune in not having been robbed before. There we noticed a quaint and ancient guide-post with four gaunt arms of rusty iron stretching forth to the four points of the way, with a thin hand at the end of each arm having a finger extended as a pointer. Somehow that ancient guide-post arrested our attention more than its size would seem to warrant; to me, in the gathering gloom, it had a weird, uncanny look, though exactly why I cannot say. We even troubled to pull up, the more narrowly to inspect it, and observed the date 1699 thereon, so a fairly long while has it stood there silently showing the way to one generation of travellers after another. Can there be such a thing as a spirit of place, or why did the sight

of that tall guide-post, standing solitary there darkly silhouetted against the fading light of the western sky so impress me, that of all the many minor roadside spots encountered on our tour, it remains by far the most vivid in my memory? Each arm bears an inscription cut out in shapely old-fashioned letters, running thus: "The Waye to Warwicke; The Waye to Oxford; The Waye to Gloster; The Waye to Woster." We had a choice of roads.

I know not how it was, but somehow I instinctively felt that there must be some story connected with that guide-post could I unearth it. It was one of those inexplicable sensations that occasionally comes over the traveller in lonely spots. Just then a man appeared upon the road; so intent had I been inspecting the ancient post that I had not observed his approach. He bade us a civil good-day, and I returned his salutation. "That's a curious old sign-post," I remarked; "do you know if there is any history connected with it?" "I expects as how you be a stranger in these parts," responded he; so instead of answering our question he asked us another—and I have noticed that country folk are often prone to do this; the fact is, they like to talk. Some years ago *Punch* had a picture of a traveller asking his way of a stone-breaker by the roadside. "Can you tell me, my good man, if this is the way to Dash?" "Where be you come from?" exclaims the party addressed, instead of giving the information desired. "What's that to you?" retorts the traveller. "Oh," responds the man, "it's nought to

me where you be come from, or where you be going to"; and nothing more would he say.

However, to return to ourselves, we acknowledged being strangers in the land, and ventured to repeat our query—this time not unsuccessfully. "Oh! that funny old sign-post? It stands, they say, where a gibbet used to be. You won't know the story of a mother and her son having been hung there for a crime that was never committed; and, what's more, it's a true story,—true as I'm standing here a-telling it to you. The man was hung for the supposed murder of his master, though his master's dead body, after much searching, could nowhere be found; and his mother was hung as a witch, because by her arts she had prevented the body being discovered. Then, whilst the bodies of the unfortunate mother and son were hanging there in chains, the man who was supposed to have been murdered reappeared at his home, and quietly walked in at the open door. He had a strange story to tell of having been waylaid by three men and taken to sea, and forced to serve on board a pirate ship; but no one could make much out of his story, and some people said he must have gone mad, but he stuck to his tale. I know it's all true, because I read it in print in an old book." According to my experience, most country folk hold that any happening must be true if they have seen it recorded in print. Such implicit faith in the magic of print is touching, and now that we have taught the many to read, it is not without its significance.

"At one time," continued our informant, nothing

loath to be informing, "few folks cared to pass there at nights, as the ghosts of the woman and her son were said to haunt the spot; and you could not get a horse to go by it, even though nothing at the time could be seen." "I suppose," I said jokingly, though the man appeared to take me seriously, "that it won't be much use our stopping here till midnight on the chance of seeing the ghost or ghosts? I've never seen a ghost yet; and a motor car is not like a horse, it won't take fright." "Bless you, no," exclaimed the man, "no ghost has ever been seen here in my time." And with an air of superiority he added, "I don't believe in ghosts myself; it's time enough to believe in a ghost when you have seen one; but the rest of the story is gospel true." With regard to his philosophy about ghosts, we were with him. Though I have slept in a haunted room, walked by a genuine ghost, yet it failed to make its presence known to me—even at the appointed hour when it was said to appear. It must have been unavoidably detained that night, for I gave it an hour's grace, then fell fast asleep, and remained so undisturbed until the cock-crow of the following morning. Unpunctual ghosts deserve to be discredited.

Then we took the "Waye to Warwicke," and soon reached Chipping Campden, that delightful specimen of an unspoilt old-world town, standing solitary on a hill, with its railway station a mile or more away, and fortunately out of sight in the valley below. Chipping Campden possesses the peculiar charm that Time alone can give—the charm of ancientness.

It is a clean, quiet, and cheerful town that has seen better days, for once it flourished exceedingly, being the great wool centre of the Cotswolds—then far famed for "sheep and sinners,"—a town where the fleeces from the farms around were collected in vast quantities and bought for export by the merchants "of the Staple of Calais," who greatly enriched themselves by this trade. I prefer a town that has seen better days to one that is modern and prospering, at any rate to look upon, and to live in.

> A place where poets still may dream,
> Where the wheels of Life swing slow;
> And over all there hangs the peace
> Of centuries ago.

What appeals to me so strongly about these old stone-built Cotswold towns is the fairness of their architecture, the clean look of their quiet streets, the smokeless air above, and the general homeliness of them. Moreover, they are finished towns, a quality rarely to be met with in this progressive age. They have ceased to grow, yet are not forsaken or dull; no ugly suburbs of pretentious villas eat into the green country about them, so you can quickly get away into the green fields around without the adventitious aid of cycle or cab, or tram or train. Of all inanimate things, next to an old house I love best a quaint old town that has not suffered from so-called modern improvements: nothing devised by man for his dwelling or convenience has he devised better. So think I, at least, who love a quiet life and beautiful surroundings, and who find a crowd but poor company.

The long, broad street of Chipping Campden is lined with gabled houses mostly of the seventeenth century, though some are older; and islanded there stands its quaint market-house, built in 1642, when English architecture was a living art, and not a mere, more or less, soulless reproduction of the work of other days. Simplicity and good proportion is the keynote of beautiful building, and these the old Cotswold buildings all possess. A pleasanter little town than Chipping Campden it would be hard to find in all the pleasant land. Fortunately, or unfortunately, it lies somewhat out of the beat of ordinary travel.

High above the grey roofs of the town rises, in isolated stateliness, the tall tower of its beautiful and ancient church, a cathedral in miniature, an embodiment in carved stone of the religious zeal of past days. The tower gains in impressiveness from its happy situation, standing as it does apart and high on the lonely hill. The church, we gathered, owes its conception and existence to the combined piety and prosperity of the God-fearing wool-staplers of old, who doubtless hoped it would "canopy their bones till Doomsday." That day has not come yet, but the church they built still stands firm in its strength, and its roof still covers the stately monuments of its founders and benefactors—whose souls now rest in peace, I hope.

CHAPTER X

Profitable farming—A discovery—A mellow land—The blessing of poverty!—Restorer or destroyer—A church clerk's curious story—Changeful weather—Chat with a farmer—A lone inn with a history—The personality of places—The old Holyhead road—A holiday spot—The famous "Wonder" coach.

From Chipping Campden we dropped down steeply into a flat country boasting a levelness that would have done credit to Holland. After the lonely, open, hilly Cotswolds, with their spacious prospects, it was a sharp contrast to come into this much-cultivated land, where the horizon was sadly limited, and where every yard of soil seemed tilled to the uttermost. It was a land of fruit, flower, and vegetable farms—at least, we were told they were farms; to us they looked more like market-gardens, divided by trim hedges, so that the country suggested a gigantic chessboard, though of somewhat irregular and varied coloured squares. It was a prospect to please the utilitarian, though it did not appeal to us, who, like the famous Dr. Syntax, were in search of the picturesque. Still, it was something to learn that, in these parts, the land was made to pay, and that the small holdings were profitable. In travelling through England one hears so much of agricultural depression, that it is

cheering to come to a rural district where every one seems prosperous; and we observed more women at work on the ground than men, and they worked industriously too.

Then gradually we left the small holdings behind and reached a more open and pastoral country that was far more pleasing to the eye, and presently we found ourselves in a little village of no great charm; but peeping over its lowly cottages we espied a large and long stone building of some distinction and that looked like a huge tithe-barn. We promptly stopped the car and walked across some fields to inspect the building. Our conjectures were right; there before us stood a rarely fine specimen of the monks' careful and lasting work, wherein they gathered the produce of what they had not toiled to sow or reap—and gathered plentifully, judging by the size of the structure.

A man was standing in the field close by the barn, and from him we learnt that the village was Littleton. Then, seeing us preparing to photograph the barn, he exclaimed, "You be going to take the old building. They say she is the largest barn in the country, and all built of squared stones too. They called her the Abbey barn, as she belonged to Evesham Abbey once. She be very old." I said smilingly I was glad to hear it was a she barn. "Well, it's not a he barn, is it?" he retorted. "Perhaps it's an it barn," I suggested. Then there was silence; the man was manifestly pondering the matter over. I don't think he quite appreciated my joking remark. Country folk never

like their speech criticised, and I regretted my want of manners. Country folk, too, are not always so simple as they look, or their speech would lead one to imagine, and our native was a case in point.

After a time, the man broke the silence; he had been pondering to some purpose. Said he, "You call a man-o'-war she, don't you? Can you tell me how a *man*-o'-war can be a she?" putting emphasis on the word man. And that simple countryman puzzled me how to answer him; to hint that a man-o'-war was generally spoken of as a battleship to-day would not improve matters much, for a battleship does not suggest the feminine gender. However, I conveniently turned the conversation, and asked him about the village church, with the further object of gathering if there were anything of interest in it. "Well," replied he, "I don't mind as how there be anything to see there except the pulpit and the pews. I don't often go to church myself; I'm not a religionist." I said I was sorry to hear that. To this he made no reply, but merely remarked he would like to drink my good health, as he did not often meet a stranger, and when he did he always liked to drink his health for luck. As he was civil-spoken, though not a "religionist," I parted with the usual twopence, which he received with thanks, assuring me that he would not fail to do as he suggested; then he went his way—I wonder if it were to the public-house. I noticed that he was in some haste to depart; and certainly the day was hot. He was a bit of a character, and I wish I could have talked further with him and

learnt his views on village life; but a thirsty native with "the price of a glass of ale" in his hand, and a public-house near by, is not a man to waste his precious time gossiping. I ought to have kept that twopence in my pocket a little longer. What a power in the land is a glass of ale!

But to return to the tithe-barn, of which I give an illustration, reproduced from my photograph, which may give some idea, though, I fear, rather a poor one, of this fine example of medieval masonry that has suffered but little from the wear and weathering of years. So large and long was the barn that I was unable to get all of it on my photographic plate without going so far back as to lose much interesting detail; as it is, the beautiful stone-laying of the walls is scarcely shown—the clever arrangement of hewn stones in varying, yet orderly, horizontal lines, so that even the plain wall is full of character: there is thought in it, a something beyond a mere putting of one stone upon another. The pleasantly proportioned buttress against the walls, the shapely and keyless arch of the central entrance of uncommon curves, the massive roof of stone slats, and two great gables with their curious finials are clearly shown. How long the barn has been built I know not, but I should imagine it has existed for over three centuries—probably a good deal over—with little or no attempt at keeping it in repair; and, excepting that the ridge of the roof is slightly bent here and there, the building is still strong and substantial, and shows no signs of weakness. So good and true was the work of the

ABBEY TITHE-BARN, LITTLETON.

ancient craftsmen, who built for the glory of God, who sees everywhere; they did not attempt "to cheat their Lord" by building badly what was hidden; for, whether it were a barn or an abbey, those old monks took infinite pains to build as well as they knew how, and of the art of building they were past-masters. The barn now bounds, in part, a farmyard, and has some disfiguring sheds built up against it, spoiling its original fair symmetry; still, had it been a stately abbey, it would probably have been a hopeless ruin.

Leaving Littleton, we motored along devious roads, and crossing the Avon by an ancient bridge of many arches, we struck upon a purely agricultural country, a country of homely farmsteads and sleepy villages that did not challenge admiration, yet were admirable and beautiful with the bloom of age. The land had an old and mellow look more suggestive of the Elizabethan days than of this progressive, ugly age. I think that where man and nature have long been on terms of familiar intimacy the land bears a soft, ripe, humanised aspect that only centuries of such intimacy can give. A haunting charm to be felt, not described, for words have their limit. We were travelling through a land over which there brooded an old-world calm, and wherein men lived contented, if uneventful lives, a land unblest with minerals, a land of clear skies, not over-prosperous, and so not uglified.

This want of pence is oftentimes a curse, but in a picturesque point of view a blessing. I was once shown over an interesting old church that for this

want of pence had merely had needful repairs done to it, so that its priceless gift of ancientness had not been destroyed. The art of the restorer can easily make old work look raw and new, but he cannot, with all his cleverness, make new work look like old,—money will not buy the rare patina of age. The walls of the old church had been simply cleaned, but the ancient surface had been spared; they had not been so scraped and re-pointed as to look like new. The tracery of the windows, where broken or decayed, had been carefully replaced with work to match the old, to the best of the skill of the local mason; and a man not too proud to faithfully copy good work is a man to be respected. The carved oak where worm-eaten or broken had been made good, not cast away as worthless rubbish; and the stone paving had been carefully relaid without disturbing or damaging the interesting brasses thereon,—so the flavour of antiquity remained, and the general harmony of the medieval interior was happily preserved. Blessed be poverty! I felt again inclined to utter aloud as I looked upon that unspoilt church; better the untutored mason than the ill-informed, arrogant restorer full of original notions, complacent in his ignorance.

The ways of the restorer are truly astonishing and grievous. I was told, some time ago, of a certain church that in the early Victorian era had its uneven floor laid all over and levelled with concrete, a floor containing some old brasses and inscribed stones, and on the concrete was put down modern Minton tiles of aggressive colours. So history is destroyed

and the fitness of things disregarded. An equally astounding incident was related to me by a Lincolnshire parson, that is, if local tradition were true, which came to him through an ancient clerk. This clerk told him that when the church in question was restored in his boyhood, he remembered that the worn stones of the flooring with the memorials of the dead upon them, and some of these were brasses, had been taken up and simply turned over in order to secure an even floor cheaply. The parson, who was a bit of an antiquary, confided to me that he longed to take that floor up again. "If I could only do it," he said, "what discoveries I might make." I sympathised with him, for it would be a task after my own heart. At any rate perhaps the brasses were better hidden there than stolen, for if stolen they would most probably never be recovered; but as it was, if the clerk's story were true, of which the parson had little doubt, well, the brasses were still in the church, and might some day be unearthed. A year or two back a dealer in curiosities offered to sell me a very interesting old brass of the fifteenth century, plundered, I take it, from some ancient church. Nothing is sacred to a curiosity dealer.

A fresh west wind was blowing across the country; the pleasantest wind there is, only unfortunately it blew up a mass of slate-coloured clouds, and soon a misty rain began to fall. However, the traveller in England must not heed the weather. But the rain blotted out the distance, and to that extent spoilt our enjoyment of the scenery. We still were bearing north-westerly as well as we could, and the by-roads

favoured us. The country was moderately hilly, the houses on the way were few, though the sign-posts were plentiful, but the name places of the villages thereon were not helpful. We did not want to go to Little Slowcombe or to any other particular village, so we kept turning up one lane and another wondering when a town would materialise, though we were in no way anxious to reach one. So we drove on moodily for many miles, for the rain came steadily down, and the prospect was not exhilarating. At last we emerged upon a broad highway, and we were not sorry in such dismal weather to have a good open road before us.

Eventually we took shelter beneath a wide railway bridge, where we found, seated in his ramshackle gig, a portly, jovial-looking farmer likewise sheltering; at least we took him to be such, and the seasoned road traveller can generally guess aright the company he meets on the way. The prospect ahead was not inspiriting—a vision through the railway arch of a grey downpour, a sodden bank of grass with some dripping trees thereon, and nothing more. However, we determined to put a good face on matters, so we exclaimed to the man in the gig in a cheery voice, "Nice rain, will do the country a lot of good." We rather fancied that the country did not need the rain, and certainly we did not; still we praised the weather; we wished to think optimistically. The farmer looked at us and grunted, "We don't want rain, we want sunshine." But then farmers never are satisfied with the weather, and when they do rarely praise it, they do so with much reserve. Then we got talking

about the crops, cattle feeding, and agriculture generally, of which we understood little, but it pleased the farmer to talk, and it helped to pass the time. All we had to do was to listen and appear interested. It must not be forgotten that Dr. Johnson whilst a great talker was a good listener. Though we have not lost the art of talking, I greatly fear we have also lost the more difficult art of listening. If you can only get those chance throws in your way to chat on any topic that interests them, not a difficult feat, you are sure to make a good impression; and to do this is a traveller's duty, not only for his own satisfaction, but for the benefit of others after him. Then we asked the farmer where the road ahead led, so ignorant were we of our whereabouts. "Straight on," said he, "takes you to Kiddy; it's only two miles away." "Kiddy," we exclaimed; "we never heard of Kiddy. What sort of a place is it?" "Why, Kiddy's a big town," responded he. Then we suddenly remembered that "Kiddy" was the local shortening of Kidderminster. It is convenient to know these things. After this the farmer said, "It's no good waiting any longer for the blessed rain to stop." At least he used that adjective, though just previously he had abused the rain, and bidding us good day, he drove off, and we also.

We passed through "Kiddy" in a regular downpour, and dismal enough the town looked under those conditions; but the streets were clear of traffic except for the tram-cars, so we were soon in the open country again, when the clouds seemed sud-

denly to lift, and the sun actually showed itself, niggardly at first and very watery, but we were pleased with even this poor promise of better things. So, in renewed spirits, we followed the road, and as we progressed the weather gradually improved, till, when we came to a picturesque old inn by the wayside, it actually shone forth brilliantly. "A good, honest ale-house," Izaak Walton would probably have dubbed it. A solitary inn in a deserted-looking district, that brought to mind Hardy's "Trampwoman's Tragedy"—

> Lone inns we loved, my man and I,
> My man and I;
> "King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,
> "The Horse" on Hintock Green,
> The cosy house at Wynyard's Gap,
> "The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,
> And many another wayside tap
> Where folk might sit unseen.

A sign, swinging creakingly on its post, proclaimed this humble inn to be the "Dick Whittington." There we pulled up to take a photograph of the old house, for it had a quaint and pleasant look.

I know not how it is, unless there be such a thing as a personality of places, a subtle something about particular buildings that strangely influences us, but certain old houses I have come across, at the first sight, without any apparent cause, suggest to me that they have a history, or a tradition connected with them, and seldom have I found my intuition at fault. To me this feeling is a very real one, though for its existence I can give no reasonable explanation. Once I wandered into a large

THE DICK WHITTINGTON INN, NEAR KINVER.

and romantic village, away in a remote corner of the West Country. I had never been there before, and of its local history I knew nothing, but I was struck by the number of its beautiful old homes, such as one rarely finds in villages. As I strolled about the place, two ancient houses there specially attracted me, not because they were architecturally more important or more eye-pleasing than the others, but because I felt instinctively that something, in past times, had happened within them of more than everyday interest. Indeed, there were other old houses in the village, externally more picturesque and more noteworthy, with their great gables and porches, but those two impressed me more than all the rest. So much so, that on returning to the village inn I queried the landlord about them, and found that in one house Charles I. had slept the night, and in the other that Cromwell had stopped over a day. I quite expected some such tradition, and from careful hunting up of ancient history, I am convinced that the tradition was founded on fact. And this is not a singular instance of the peculiar influences certain places have over me.

So with the "Dick Whittington" inn. At the first glance at the old half-timbered hostel it appealed to my imagination; that house, I thought to myself, is a house of memories, there must surely be some story connected with it worth unearthing. So I walked in, and ventured to "try the tap" as an excuse, if possible, to have a chat with the landlord. Fortune favoured me. The landlord himself

served me with a glass of ale, cool, clear, and unexpectedly good—a draught fit for a king, it seemed to me. Then I remarked, by way of a feeler, "This is a curious old house of yours?" "Yes, that it be," replied mine host; "it has been a licensed house for 400 years. Charles II. stopped and hid here in 1651, when on his way to Boscobel after the battle of Worcester. That's an historic fact. I have only recently come here; the house is a bit out of repair, but I hopes to get it right soon. It were a flourishing inn once, and now that motors come along the roads, I hope to make it pay again. We've got a bowling-green at the back. If you care to look over the place, I'll get the missus to show you over, with pleasure. There's a fine old oak staircase, an oak-panelled room, and the secret place where Charles II. hid, worth seeing." Mine host was one of the right sort. Long may he live and prosper, that good-natured landlord of the "Dick Whittington." I gratefully accepted his kind offer to be shown over the old house, and in his wife he had a worthy mate, for she was quiet-spoken, and took much time and trouble to show me the oak staircase, the hiding-hole, the great original oak door with its ancient fastenings, and other interesting minor details. And I received all this kindness for the cost of a glass of ale, and a little civility that cost nothing, though I fancy the civility profited me the most. "What a while you've been over your glass of ale," exclaimed my wife as I returned to the car. I had to explain that I had been doing something more profitable than merely drinking ale; then

looking at my watch, I found I had been an hour away.

As we proceeded the sky to the right assumed a grey, smoky, sombre tint, that for the moment puzzled us; then we consulted our map, and found that we were skirting the Black Country; and to that land of desolation we were not minded to go. The distant view of the dingy sky of it was depressing enough. Then suddenly the hedgerows ceased, and rows of houses lined our road in place of the green fields; we were driving into a town, so we pulled up to ask where we were. "You're on the outskirts of Wolverhampton, straight on takes you into it," came the reply to our query. This was unwelcome news. Wolverhampton is not exactly the place one would go to in search of the picturesque. However, I espied a lane to the left that looked as though it might lead into the country again, and so down this we turned. It was not an ideal lane, for at first it was bounded by many modern cottages, but it gradually grew countrified, and after many uncertain windings we found ourselves upon a wide highway, with long lines of telegraph posts by its sides; and this proved to be the old "London to Holyhead, Parliamentary and Mail-Coach Road," to give it its ancient title. "Let us stick to it till we get to Wales; I'm just longing to get a glimpse of the mountains again," said my wife; "it's only sixty miles, according to the road-book, to Llangollen, and we could easily get there by the evening. Let us sleep amongst the hills to-night." "Agreed," I responded, "the

Fates, in the shape of the motor car, permitting, to-night we will sleep amongst the hills. But why, oh why, at tourist-haunted and familiar Llangollen? Let us strive for a less-known spot and fresher surroundings. Now, I was reading the other day about Glyn-Ceiriog, a lovely out-of-the-way spot amongst the mountains, and only six miles or so from Chirk I make it from the map," which we had stopped to consult. "You see we should have to pass through Chirk to get to Llangollen, and Glyn-Ceiriog is no farther away from there than Llangollen. The road-book says there is an inn in the village. Let us sample the charms of Glyn; at least we shall break new ground." So to Glyn it was decided we would go. It is a good wife who sees things through her husband's eyes; that is the ideal companion to travel with.

Before I left home I had noted an article in a magazine giving an attractive account of Glyn—I beg permission to use the shorter term—how it lay remote in the heart of the mountains and well off the beaten track, and how Sir Theodore Martin wrote of it, "I have often lingered on there in the enjoyment of the beautiful valley, its sparkling streams, and the invigorating air of its mountains. A more delightful retreat for a quiet holiday 'far from the madding crowd' I know not. To people who long for rest and quietness the Glyn valley offers that." When I read that article I made a mental note to explore that delightful retreat one day, and now the opportunity had come.

As to the scenery of the old Holyhead road, I am fain to confess it disappointed us as far as Shrewsbury; from Shrewsbury to Chirk it passes through a pleasant stretch of pastoral country; but from Chirk all the fifty miles on to Llyn Ogwen, for beautiful, changeful, and even striking scenery (excepting for an extent of bleak moorland that, however, is not without its wild charms) I really think there is no equal extent of highway in Britain so variously delightful. It has all the attractions of shapely mountains, tumbling rivers, foaming falls, rich woods, and open moors, and these succeed one another in rapid succession; you have no time to weary of one class of scenery before another of a different type, strongly contrasting, takes its place.

In the old coaching days the Holyhead road was famed as being the fastest in the land; that is, after the great improvements on it had been carried out, under Telford the engineer, by order of Parliament, many embankments and cuttings having been made to improve the gradients. Had the railway been invented a little later or the motor car somewhat earlier our roads would probably have been vastly better, for it was contemplated to treat all the main highways in a similar manner; but the coming of the locomotive put a stop to the many projected road improvements. The fastest coach in England was the famous "Wonder," that did the 153¼ miles from London to Shrewsbury in the day, at the time rightly considered a marvellous performance. Not only was it the fastest coach in the land, but, according to Edward Corbett, "it was

unrivalled in its punctuality"; the people on the road even setting their clocks and watches by it as it passed by. According to the same authority, the Stroud mail was the slowest mail-coach, and this "used to be the most frequently overturned of any."

CHAPTER XI

The motor on the road—Small country towns—Spoilt by prosperity—Chat with a miner—A picturesque and ancient hostelry—The spirit of the highway—The true story of Dick Whittington—Whittington Castle—The Welsh landscape—Curious optical illusion—A lovely valley—Glyn-Ceiriog—In good company—Poaching no sin—Tales of Taffy.

At the ugly little town of Shiffnal we pulled up to replenish our running tank with petrol. Quite an hourly occurrence I should imagine nowadays on a much-travelled main highway; yet we did not do this simple thing without a crowd of youthful spectators gathering round, though, be it acknowledged, they were well-behaved spectators, who appeared to take as much interest in the car as though it were not the common object of the road it has become. In the old times the youthful population of places who watched with eager eyes the coming and going of the coaches all desired to be coachmen; to-day the height of their ambition is to be motor-car drivers; it may be that the generation which follows will aspire to drive flying machines. So rapid is the progress of the age, that the impossible of to-day is the accomplished fact of to-morrow.

In the sky
Men will fly
By and by.

These three lines of an old song come to my recollection; little did the writer of that song, I ween, when he composed it, deem that he was doing anything more than wildly romancing.

I know not how it is, but in these small country towns one meets with only very young or very old people; yet the youngsters must have middle-aged parents, but where these parents hide themselves always puzzles me. I have noticed this curious fact in many a small town. It is not the time of day, for we have passed, and stopped, at these small towns at varying hours from early morning till late evening when the sun was setting.

I am tempted to quote here the short account of Shiffnal as given in my copy of *Paterson's Roads*, the Bradshaw of the coaching age. Though the last edition of this useful work is dated 1826, it is still the best road-book I know. This then is Paterson's description of the town: "Shiffnal contains little worthy of note, except its church, which is a spacious building, very suitably decorated in a superior style, and containing several monuments and inscriptions, particularly one to the memory of William Wakeley, who lived to the advanced age of 124, under the reigns of eight different kings and queens." The description of the church as being "very suitably decorated in a superior style" reads somewhat odd, but such accounts satisfied our ancestors. We were glad though to have our

attention called to a man who lived in this troublesome world so long; happily also, let us hope.

In the main street of Shiffnal—I am not sure that it has any other—we noticed a comfortable-looking inn, the "Jerningham Arms," displaying the largest and most gorgeous sign that, I think, I have ever beheld. This huge signboard was covered with a bewildering mass of coats-of-arms (bewildering at least to a man with little knowledge of heraldry), all coloured and gilt so as to make a brave show in the sunshine. It is the one thing in Shiffnal that I can now distinctly remember. I have a great liking for these old inn signs with their scrolled supports and brackets of wrought-iron, the latter often fine in form, and generally survivals of the smith's art handicraft of an earlier day. Though the present representations on these signboards, the former ones having weathered away, of White Harts, Red, White, and Golden Lions, Green Dragons, with other designs and heraldic devices, are mostly crudely done, they provide a welcome bit of colour that our buildings sadly lack. They have the virtue of brightening up a dull street, and often give a touch of character to a characterless building.

I have a sentimental preference for an hostelry that proclaims itself with a good old-fashioned sign, intended to attract, and that does attract, the traveller's eye; and if it stands a little apart from the house supported on an upright post, as an inn sign should be, the more it pleases me. My sentimental feeling goes so far, indeed, that I always fancy, yet I think it is something more than fancy,

that I take my ease and enjoy my sojourn at my inn better with the sign of the "Red Lion" swinging without, or whatever it chance to be, than at a signless hotel whose name is simply painted on its front. And when I come to think the matter over, all my favourite country inns, where the fare is good, the beds clean, and the bills are moderate, are provided with old-fashioned signs, boldly in evidence, either on a big supporting wrought-iron bracket, or on a post. And an inn must be really good and comfortable, not showy, in order that I should remember it favourably. The wise traveller when he has found such an inn much to his liking, will keep his discovery to himself. In this respect I think selfishness a virtue, even a duty to fellow-travellers of quiet tastes, for many a delightful and genuinely comfortable old-fashioned inn has been spoilt by prosperity and converted into an expensive and comfortless hotel. I have sadly sinned myself and suffered by being unselfish in this matter, now I have determined to sin so no more.

From Shiffnal we made our way to Shrewsbury, passing, at one spot, some large collieries with their huge cinder banks, gaunt engine-houses, and rows of hideous miners' cottages that were the ugliest feature of all; the combined whole forming a blot on the fair landscape that even the bright sunshine could not beautify: still, even ugliness has its uses, acting as it does as a foil to fairer things. "It's not a pretty spot," one of the colliers confessed to me; "but coal is cheap, and poor people here can afford warm fires in the winter time. It's cosy

and comfortable working underground, though you mightn't think it, and we never trouble below about the weather; if it rains, or snows, or freezes, it be all the same to us. I'm so used to it now that I would far rather work underground than above. I dare say I look pretty grimy, but I'm used to that, so's every one else in these parts; then soap's cheap, and you wouldn't know me on Sundays when I clean up a bit." If Sundays had not been ordained, we should have had to invent them for the benefit of mankind and general tidiness; a clean face, a clean shirt, and a clean collar once a week make a difference to a man who does without such luxuries for six days on end, it helps him to respect himself. It is a good thing for other people that there are men who care to be colliers in the world, though personally I infinitely prefer clean, fragrant wood and odorous peat for my fires, to black and dirty coal; but if every one did so, probably there would not be wood, or peat, enough to go round.

Entering Shrewsbury, we noticed a charming half-timber hostelry by the roadside. We pulled up to photograph this, for it was a picture of a building. A well-intentioned policeman standing near by, misunderstanding the purport of our stop, came up to the car and confided to me that there was a better hotel in the town, though to us it looked sufficiently good; but then policemen and magistrates—especially magistrates when the unfortunate motorist, innocently or otherwise, exceeds the speed limit—appear to consider every motor owner a millionaire. I only wish I were! However, I thanked the constable

for his information, he doubtless meant well, adding, "But not so picturesque a one surely?" He looked at us in blank astonishment, as though any man in his senses would regard an hotel from a picturesque point of view; then he recovered himself, and responded, "I merely thought, as being one of the quality, you would like to know the best hotel." We felt flattered, not unduly, I trust, at his estimate of us, though not to the extent of tipping him. I do not want to pay for being called "one of the quality." I even ventured to assure him we were only ordinary, common tourists, somewhat travel-stained, not of the quality. He merely smiled. You cannot joke with a constable, he takes far too serious a view of life, and to be serious is to be dull. Yet in spite of the gratuitous information imparted to us (with the best intentions, I believe), had we desired rest or refreshment, we should certainly have patronised that ancient inn with much confidence. Indeed, I felt genuinely sorry that just then we had no need, nor spare time, to do so, for if its interior were as picturesque as its exterior, it would well have repaid inspection.

Then we ascended the steep and curiously named street of Wyle Cop, and found ourselves in the heart of quaint old Shrewsbury. There we stopped to inquire our way. You drive from the country into the centre of a town quite naturally, there is no trouble about that, but your exit in a desired direction is not so simple. Of course there are always people about of whom to ask the way. Provokingly enough, however, though the inhabitants of a place

know the streets therein, unless you chance upon a cyclist, you can seldom find any one who knows the outlets leading to the towns beyond. In this case no sooner had we pulled up than we espied a sign-post with a big extended arm having boldly painted on it, "To Holyhead"; those two words and nothing more. Now Holyhead is over a hundred honest miles away from Shrewsbury. A grand road this, with a due sense of its importance, you feel, to deal so lightly with distance and to scorn any mention of towns on the way; it merely passes through Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury is nothing to it—its business is with Holyhead. I was impressed by that sign-post in such an unusual position in the heart of the town; it was manifestly there to point you the way through it, so that the traveller need not suffer delay. The spirit of this historic old mail road is speed, a road that heeds nothing but its destination; its only concern is with London and Holyhead. Indeed, a little later on, at a lonely corner of the road near by Capel Curig, we observed a solitary and dignified sign-post, for a sign-post can be dignified, with two outstretched arms pointing in opposite directions, briefly inscribed respectively on one and the other, "Holyhead, 39 miles." "London, 220 miles." A business-like sign-post that, and 220 miles is a fairly long stage, there is no pettiness about it.

We left Shrewsbury without stopping to buy

A Shrewsbury cake
Of Palin's own make.

Though I understand we ought to have done this

for luck; but we had become infected with the spirit of the road, which brooks no delay for trifles. I wonder what Telford, the famous engineer of this fine road, would think could he come to life again and witness the motor car rushing along his smooth highway, outpacing the fastest mail-coach of his day —even that "marvel of speed" the "Wonder"? And the ghosts of the old mail-drivers, what would they think too? There were no police traps in those times, but every age has its drawbacks; then the toll-gates on the roads were innumerable and taxed the traveller unmercifully. According to Edward Corbett, "A coach running daily between London and Birmingham paid annually for toll-gates the sum of £1428." I remember those old toll-gates when I was young, and without pleasure, for they used to lighten my purse considerably when I took long driving tours.

Leaving Shrewsbury, we drove into a quiet land of velvety meadows and leafy woods, a land whereon the noon sun shone warmly down, and the lazy cattle in the rich pastures stood under the cool shelter of the wide-branching trees, as still as if in a painted picture; perhaps they were thinking, for Emerson declares cattle have "great and tranquil thoughts"; so quiet indeed the country seemed, that we felt as though it surely must be Sunday and that we had forgotten the date.

Driving dreamily on through this land of peace, we came to the pretty and tidy village of Whittington, and a man of whom we asked its name further told us that Dick Whittington, of nursery fame, was

born close by. "We be still proud of Dick Whittington," he said, "a poor orphan boy who ran away to London to make his fortune, and who took the name of this place, as he did not know his own." We were not aware of this, but for the unexpected information we returned thanks. Some people are so pleased to be informing, though often the value of the information they so gratuitously impart is in inverse ratio to their eagerness to impart it. Now Dr. Brewer says positively that Whittington was born in Gloucestershire in the middle of the fourteenth century, and was the son of a knight of good property. He went to London not as a poor boy, but provided with funds, to learn to be a merchant, and his renowned cat was his ship, cat being the name then given to a small timber craft with which Whittington made his first venture in trading. In time he came to own big ships, found fortune, fame, and a rich wife. Which prosaic facts spoil a pretty tradition, as facts have spoilt many another pretty tradition. I am almost sorry that I troubled to hunt up the true history of Dick Whittington, for he was my favourite hero, after Robinson Crusoe, when I was a boy.

At Whittington we had one of the many surprises of our journey; and I do not think we passed a day during our wanderings without some pleasant surprise. There, right in the middle of the village, stood the ruins of a grey and time-worn castle, with two ivy-clad flanking towers, and a wide, weed-grown moat that came up to the roadway. So perfect a picture it made, that for the moment it

seemed almost unreal, as though it were a scene set on a stage. To come thus wholly unexpectedly upon this wayside romance in stone gave us a delightful thrill of pleasure. That is the advantage of travelling without a guide-book; you are not prepared beforehand for what you are coming to, and beauty charms the more when it takes you by surprise. Another minor advantage is you are not bothered with the history of a place, so you can romance at will.

As for old castles, I have a ready-made history of my own that suffices me. Moreover, as far as it goes, it is generally right; I hate, when on a pleasure jaunt, to keep referring to a book, it is a worry. Once I took a guide-book with me (I found it often incorrect), and I never quite enjoyed myself till I happily lost it, then I realised the freedom a boy feels when he escapes from school. That book verily made a toil of my pleasure; I was for ever consulting it, fearing lest I should miss something of interest on the way—and afterwards I found I missed many things not mentioned in its pages. It may be that the writer deemed these of no interest, perhaps he did not know of them, things that possibly I should have discovered unaided by listening, as I do now, to the country folk, by making inquiries as I travel on, by consulting the landlord of my inn, and above all, by exploring unfrequented by-roads. Now I give the recipe of my ready-made history of castles; it is a very simple one. It was built by a Norman warrior, it was garrisoned for Charles I., then it was taken and "slighted" by the Parliamentarians. But

WHITTINGTON CASTLE.

it was the present picturesqueness of Whittington's grey and ruined castle that mostly concerned us, not its past story. The past belongs to the past, the present to us.

As we neared the Welsh boundary the landscape became less orderly, though not the less beautiful on that account; it had a Celtic flavour, if I may be allowed the expression. The whole character of the landscape gradually changed as we drove on, the mellow, homelike look was giving place to one less paternal. The gentle English country of green meadows, carefully tilled fields, and enclosing hedgerows we were leaving behind for a wilder land, where on the lone mountains and the wide moors the eye and foot could wander free from artificial boundaries. We inherit, I am told, the virtues, vices, and idiosyncrasies of many generations gone. I wonder, do we in some measure look upon the world with the eyes of our ancestors? Do we like the things they liked, and the reverse? If so, I feel that some of my ancestors must have lived amongst the mountains, and greatly loved them. Our forefathers were more at home with Nature than we, they had a nearer kinship to her; still centuries of civilisation have not eradicated our love of the wild and of things that are primitive. Before we became citizens, "Nature made us men."

Chirk, which we reached when the sun was low and the shadows were lengthening, did not greatly charm us. Not that it was an ugly village; it was simply unattractive, like some people who possess every virtue but that of pleasing. It may be that

it was the sharp contrast with picturesque Whittington, we had so recently left, that caused it to appear unfavourable in our eyes. "Comparisons are odious," says the proverb, but one cannot help making them. Though Welsh scenery is, to my mind, the most beautiful in the world, Welsh villages with a few rare exceptions are unworthy of their setting. The Welsh cottages seldom have flower gardens; when he has a little garden, the thrifty Welshman prefers to grow profitable vegetables in it. The Welsh villager does not love flowers as the English villager does, but he loves music, and sings and plays on various instruments uncommonly well and with much feeling, putting to shame his English brother in this respect. Still, however delightful, an air that is finished is gone for ever, it is only for the listeners at the time; but what the eye feasts upon, remains for other eyes to enjoy; its charms are not only for the moment.

At Chirk we pulled up, if that be the right expression to use for the stopping of a motor car, to inquire our way to Glyn-Ceiriog. After this had been pointed out to us, we further inquired if there were a decent inn at Glyn. "There be a good hotel here," was the reply, "but I don't know if there be an inn at Glyn." And yet Glyn was but six miles away. "Have you ever been to Glyn?" we next asked. "Yes, I have indeed, but"—and this with an irritating air of super-goodness—"I never go into public-houses." Then this superior person walked away, and we determined to drive on to Glyn and chance it. We could but drive back to Chirk should we fail

to find suitable accommodation at Glyn. With a tireless car what mattered an extra six miles?

So we started forth for Glyn, dropping first down hill for a mile or more with shady woods on either side. At the foot of the descent we found ourselves in the lovely Ceiriog valley, having a clear-watered river by our side tumbling and foaming over its rocky bed towards us, wooded hills rising abruptly on either hand to the golden sky above. The valley charmed us at the outset; there was just room for the river and the road, and picturesquely there was no need for more.

> The broken landscape, by degrees
> Ascending, roughened into rigid hills.

Now we experienced a curious optical illusion that I cannot account for, and the more I have thought the matter over, the less I can account for it. We were gradually, sometimes more than gradually, ascending the valley, keeping fairly on a level with the rapidly descending river, yet all the while we appeared to be distinctly going down hill. On arriving at Glyn, where after all we found a comfortable hotel, I mentioned the fact of the deception to the landlord's daughter who received us, to be quite sure that we had made no mistake, and that the road did really ascend all the way, though the fast-falling river which we followed up appeared to be proof sufficient, to say nothing of our Ordnance map, which by the contour of the road and figures thereon clearly showed it went up hill. We were informed that the road really ascended all the way

to Glyn, and that we were by no means the first travellers who had noticed the illusion in question, indeed several people had commented to her upon it, but she had no explanation to offer. "It's very curious," she said, "nearly everybody who drives here from Chirk, for the first time, remarks upon it, but no one can account for it." On afterwards returning to Chirk it was manifest that we drove down hill from Glyn for five miles or so, therefore we must have driven up it, and so the optical illusion was real, nor were we the only ones to experience it.

But I am a little previous. That drive up the Ceiriog valley in the quiet gloaming, when a landscape always looks its best, with the soft lights and vague shadows over all, was a drive to be remembered. All Nature, except the running water, seemed at rest; the only sound we heard was that of the river foaming and frolicking along and making the valley musical with its song. Here it flowed gurgling and glittering beneath the open sky, there it raced under a grey, one-arched and rugged bridge —and how charmingly picturesque those old Welsh bridges are—anon it turned an ancient mill overhung by darkling trees, then, now and again, it rested awhile in stilly pools, wherein, one would imagine, a lusty trout was likely to lie concealed. Each polished pool reflected a bit of the golden glow above, a splash of vivid colour brought down to the dull earth, enlivening the gathering gloom around. Ahead the hills grew bolder, rising stately out of the shadowy valley to their sun-kissed tops, and the

pine trees below breathed forth their warm fragrance that lingered in the calm, cool air. We were driving into the mountains and their mystery. In the uncertain light of that poetic hour we seemed to be journeying through dreamland, for over all the landscape lay the glamour of the gloaming. So we came to Glyn.

The hotel at Glyn proved to be a square, solid-looking building of grey stone, somewhat severe of aspect, so much so that we drove up to its door with more or less misgiving. Within, however, all was cheerfulness. We were received by the landlord's daughter with a smile of welcome, and entered a pleasant roomy hall with an open-hearth fireplace; about the hall were cushioned easy chairs, and a table or two with papers and magazines upon them, and fishing-rods lay against the walls. We were in clover. Here, where we had expected to rough it, we found ourselves in the lap of comfort. Our bedroom was clean, sweet, and neat; our car too had a large dry shed to itself. Our thoughts went back involuntarily to the man at Chirk and his remarks that haunted us all the way up the valley, raising doubts within us as to the accommodation at Glyn; yet there were we happily installed in most desirable quarters. May we always fare as well!

We discovered that there was only one other guest there, an angler after trout, whom we joined at dinner. Now I have ever found fishermen to be good company and the best of good fellows, never yet have I met a surly or a silent one; that is, if you are willing to chat on the gentle art that seems to

breed gentleness and good-nature in all its followers. I fear, so greatly are they endeared to it, that they would scarcely enjoy their paradise—where that prince of fishermen, good old Izaak Walton, dwells in joy, I hope—without their rod and creel, and a troutful stream to whip. The table was spread, the candles lighted, and soft and soothing was the light they shed, not glaring like that of electricity, but mellow and subdued, freshly culled flowers decked the repast, we were waited on by a neat be-ribboned maid, the meal was well cooked and daintily served, —even a millionaire could not command more when taking the chances of the road.

Then after dinner we got a-chatting with our fellow-guest of many things, and of fishing in particular, and so the evening passed pleasantly enough away. Our friend informed us he had had excellent sport during his stay. He came there to catch fish, and he caught them ; each morning he set forth with a light heart, and each evening he returned with a heavy creel. Lucky man! When next I go a-fishing may such good fortune be mine. And the trout we had at dinner and the next morning at breakfast, I suspected, were of his catching ; and tasteful trout they were and fair in size. Our fellow-guest spoke well of the Ceiriog. "It abounds in trout," said he, "and they rise to the fly. It's the only Welsh river I know that is not poached, and where you may be fairly sure of sport. The Welsh generally are born poachers ; they do not look upon poaching as a sin, and in Wales you can hardly get a magistrate to convict a poacher—unless

he poaches on a Sunday, when it is a crime, for Taffy is a very religious soul."

Writing of Taffy's religious bent, reminds me of a truthful story told to me by an artist friend in whose word I have confidence. He had taken apartments in a Welsh village, and had paid his weekly bill regularly on Mondays, but one Sunday he received a telegram that caused him to leave suddenly on that day, whereupon he handed his landlady his week's rent before departing, but she declined to receive it, exclaiming, "If you are wicked enough to travel on a Sunday, I am not wicked enough to take your money on that day." Whereupon my artist friend pocketed it, remarking that she was one of the right sort. But the matter was not so simply settled as that. "I'll tell you what you can do," said the landlady, after a short consideration; "you can hand the money to my neighbour, Mrs. Dash, she's a churchwoman and not so religious as I be; she won't mind receiving it for me, and handing it to me on Monday." This, I was assured, was a faithful record of a fact without any embellishment, and from my experience of Welsh folk I can quite credit it. Did I not once take apartments in a Welsh farm-house, and did not, one Sunday, my landlord, smoking a pipe during the interval he was not attending his particular conventicle, come upon me in the sinful act of sketching a bit of beautiful scenery, and reproach me for so doing. I retorted that I thought it even a worse sin to smoke a pipe upon that day; fortunately I had just finished my pipe and had put it away in my pocket. He

exclaimed that there was a great difference between smoking a pipe and drawing a picture. And seeing no profit in continuing the argument, I held my peace. Not so my religiously-minded landlord, for after a pause he said, "I wish you would come to our chapel and hear our preacher, he would do you a lot of good." I responded that I believed the service was in Welsh, and as I did not understand that ancient language, I feared that to go to his chapel would hardly do me the wished-for good. Nevertheless I thanked him for his kind suggestion and his interest in my welfare. Civility costs nothing, but I was hardly prepared for the rejoinder: "That's the misfortune of being insufficiently educated." Yet I do not think he intended to be rude, he merely regretted my misfortune, for he stopped to talk about the weather and the crops, and to abuse his landlord because he would not reduce his rent.

CHAPTER XII

Running water—Exploring—Welsh scenery—A toy railway—Village gossips—On the moors—Miles from anywhere—The charm of solitude—"The most beautiful landscape ever beheld"—A horse-fair—The simple life—In the real country—A mountain stream—Out of the beaten track.

SOUNDLY we slept that night, lulled to rest by the musical murmuring of the river, and by the far-off faint tinkling of falling streams amongst the hills around. I know no sounds so soothing to listen to as the liquid gurgling and the plashing of running water, no sounds so sure to cause forgetfulness of that deadly canker care. Rising and falling in the still night air, wafted through our wide-open windows, came the restful songs of the streams in subdued harmonies. Nature is the oldest musician in the world, and the airs she plays are the only ones of which I never weary. How companionable too is the sound of running and falling water in the lonely night. At times it almost seems as though Mother Nature were talking to you; and though you cannot understand her ancient tongue, you seem to grasp her meaning. Perhaps it was Nature who first taught primitive man to speak. There is mystery in her voice that is not wholly mystery.

And as you listen her song becomes a lullaby, and you fall asleep and dream beautiful dreams.

We devoted the next day to seeing what we could, in that short time, of Glyn and its lovely surroundings; truly you can see but little of a spacious country in a day, long though that day may be, but you may obtain an impression of its scenery. So pleased were we with our brief exploration that we then determined, at some future time, to come again to Glyn, and at our leisure explore the wild and enchanting country around. If there be a more beautiful country on the face of the earth than wild Wales, I have failed to find it, though I have travelled far and wide in foreign lands in search of beauty. David Cox said he only went abroad for health, never in search of subjects for his brush, as abroad he could never discover any spot half as lovely as his Wales. And the Italian painter Carlandi says, "How can one explain British artists going abroad to look for painting grounds, which are often inferior, very much inferior, to those they can easily find at home? Forty years' friendship of Italy has made me enjoy better the richness and exuberance of the colour of Britain." "Exuberance of colour,"—I am glad of that phrase, for some people have declared that England is a colourless land, forgetful of the purple heather of her mountains and her moors, and the glowing gold of her gorse. Purple and gold, regal colours these! Then Carlandi adds, "Of all the places I have visited and where I have painted, North Wales most completely takes my fancy."

The village of Glyn is not specially attractive, though it is not wholly unpicturesque. Down by the river we discovered some old cottages of the kind that artists love to put in their pictures, but it was the scenery around rather than the village that charmed us so. Down by the river also we discovered a toy railway station, with its toy railway. There was a tiny locomotive, too, standing there, and some curious little carriages to match. Now at Glyn are some stone and slate quarries, though fortunately they do small harm to the landscape, for the granite and the slate quarries are underground, and consist of a series of large and lofty caverns that well repay a visit; and the little railway line, converted from a narrow tramway, conveys the stones and slates to its big brother the Great Western Railway, for distribution over the kingdom.

Behind the hotel we found a wild and extensive garden, all on a slope; a quiet and a pleasant spot wherein to moon about after a hard day's tramp amongst the hills around, and where you can escape the village gossips if you wish. Personally the village gossips interest me, and amongst the number a character or two may generally be discovered; but all men are not cast in the same mould, and some prefer their own company, so a garden at your inn to escape to and be at rest, should you wish, is an advantage. I would that every country inn had its garden, as I would that every village had its green. I prefer the sky above me to a ceiling, the soft grass to a carpet, and pleasant woods to papered walls. Then we explored a rough

and narrow road that climbed the hillside to the rugged moorlands above, where an eternal peace abides.

> A little and a lone green lane,
> That opened on a moorland wide ;
> A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain
> Of mountains circling every side.

Our morning's ramble and scramble hit happily off, in four brief lines.

A charming little road it was with a mountain stream of clear water on one side hurrying down its rocky bed in a series of would-be falls, bubbling and babbling all the way ; on the other side was a low, broken, old stone wall, overgrown with creeping mosses and richly tinted with clinging lichen, and out of its many crannies wee ferns peeped forth in graceful profusion, all delicately green. A weather-beaten and broken wall like this, so roughly built as to be more like a rockery than a fence, whose stones are weathered to the tint of the storm-stained boulders around, so that it harmonises with the rough landscape and seems a natural part of it, is even more beautiful, I think, and certainly more varied, than our familiar green hedgerows, that cut the landscape up into a sort of gigantic patchwork.

Then in time we came to the open moors, where a man can find all the solitude he needs, where the bracing breezes, charged with vitality, never fail, and where, by the way, in Wales, the wind seems always in the west.

A tramp over a wide moorland is a thing to sweep the gathered cobwebs from one's brain, and

of its pure, light air the lungs delight to take their fill. On the moors the great dome of silent sky above asserts itself, there alone with the untamed earth and the spacious sky you realise the glamour of space, and the sense of quietude, for the wandering wind surring amongst the boulders, the heather, and the long grasses, and the tinkling of little unseen streams, do not disturb the silence, but rather make it felt the more, for they are soft sounds you have to listen for, or you would hardly notice them.

Few men, I fancy, appreciate the beauties of the Welsh moors, though they may love the spaciousness and the freedom of them. To most they are but wild, boulder-strewn wastes of rough ground, with stretches of swamps here and there, and now and again a peaty pool; the rich beauty of their colour escapes them, and the peculiar and indescribable blue of their circling distances, a mysterious blue that looks like a bloom upon the hills varying from azure to the deepest and purest ultramarine. And the unshadowed light that floods the moors, what a wonderful light it is, the fulness of it is the first thing one feels; even under a cloudy sky, the soft grey light triumphs over all.

On those moors above Glyn we felt not the proverbial "ten miles from anywhere," but a moral remoteness that suggested ten hundred miles from anywhere. When you can see no human being or human dwelling, and the world around has a primeval look, as though the scenery were in the making, miles but faintly express this sentiment of remoteness. Thoreau declares, "I never found a

companion that was so companionable as solitude." Still, let philosophers say what they will, man is a sociable being, and I prefer my solitude in the company of one, so that with the famous Frenchman I may exclaim, "How beautiful is solitude." Glyn is a pedestrian's paradise, but it is no place for the motorist, for it is situated in a sort of cul-de-sac, and the roads around quickly lose themselves in the mountains. There is nothing to do there but to walk, or fish, or sketch, and I may add photograph. The car is convenient as a means of reaching Glyn, but when there you must perforce leave it in the stable. Happily it will not "eat its head off," as idle horses do.

From Glyn we retraced our road to Chirk, there was no other road to go, and at Chirk we regained the old Holyhead highway, which we proposed to follow up, more or less, to Capel Curig. A little beyond Chirk a glorious view opened out ahead, glorious enough to cause us to stop the car to admire it. We looked down and over a deep, wide, and well-wooded valley crossed by the famous Chirk viaduct, a tall structure of many arches, and beyond rose a wilderness of wild Welsh mountains, some bare to the sky and some wreathed in mists, the castled hill of Dinas Bran showing prominently amongst them. This noble viaduct that boldly spans the valley might have been the work of the Romans as far as we could tell from our point of view; nowadays, had it to be built again, I imagine an iron girder bridge would take its place, to the spoiling of the scene. In this instance, for once,

man building for purely commercial purposes has added an undoubted charm and interest to the landscape. Perhaps the finest of David Cox's water-colour drawings, now in the British Museum, shows this glorious valley and many-arched viaduct peeping above the waving woods, for Cox made the wind blow on paper, as Turner made the sun shine on canvas, and as Constable made his rounded clouds roll in the sky. This view, according to my *Paterson*, is "one of the most beautiful landscapes ever beheld"; but the old writers were apt to allow their pens to run away with them when describing scenery, and if adjectives are costless, salt is cheap. Still this view is wonderfully fine, and it inspired Cox to paint his best.

Next we came to Llangollen. I have heard much in praise of the place, but it must surely be the beautiful country of woods and hills around that people extol, and not the town, for the latter struck us as being somewhat commonplace and devoid of charm. Then our road led up the lovely Llangollen valley, down which flows the blue and sparkling Dee, singing its way to the lowlands and the sea. It was an enchanting drive, with the rugged mountains rising abruptly up on either hand from the green woods at their feet, and the bright river ever in view, fretting and foaming along its boulder-strewn bed. Towering mountain, grey crag, leafy wood, and rushing river combined to make a perfect picture—one to live long in the memory.

At the end of the pass we reached a more open country and the ugly little town of Corwen of un-

pleasant memory, for there we found a horse-fair in full progress, and its one street was blocked with untamed horses and ponies prancing about, and many men struggling amongst them wildly gesticulating and shouting words that had a strange and meaningless sound to our ears. For all the English we heard, we might as well have been in a foreign town. But how to get through the throng of men, ponies, and horses was the problem. No one appeared to take the slightest trouble to make a way for us, so we blew the horn; that only made matters worse, for the animals began to scamper all over the place, and the crowd in front of us was as dense as ever, only there was more movement in it. I never experienced so much trouble in getting through a town before; even busy Bristol, with its heavy traffic, many trams, and people who will walk all over its streets, I thought troublesome enough to get through when on a former tour; but Bristol at its worst, and its worst is bad, was nothing to Corwen that day. However, by watching our opportunity, by pushing on a foot here and a yard there, we eventually managed to get into the country and the blessed open road again; then I realised the import of those three magic words, the open road, as I never did before. But we did not get out of Corwen without much swearing of the drovers; fortunately it was in Welsh, so that we could not understand a word of it,—we did not wish to,—still it sounded very dreadful. But what one does not understand one need not grieve about. As I drove along I smiled pleasantly at the drovers, and merely

remarked, "The same to you," as though they were paying me a compliment, which, not to be less polite than they, I would return—and, I fancy, they could understand my language though I could not theirs. Corwen gave me a nightmare that night.

A little beyond the town we noticed a lone sign-post with a weather-beaten arm pointing down a by-road, and on the extended arm "Bala" was briefly inscribed. There it stood mutely appealing for some one to explore that rough-looking road; we felt quite sorry for it, for who, except he were directly bound for Bala, would desert the wide and smooth highway for the uncertain delights of a mountain track? Not the average motorist, I trow. We were about to drive on, regardless of the appeal, when we suddenly remembered that an artist friend of ours had taken a cottage somewhere on the lonely hills above Bala Lake, where for three whole years he had lived "the simple life," with much content and happiness, more than he had ever previously known, at least so he had written us. Before, he had "merely existed," as he expressed it, in a town. Now there is a difference between existing and living. "Whenever your car brings you to Wales," wrote he, "be sure you look me up and sample for yourself the joy of a genuine country life. Don't bother to write, and don't telegraph, for we have no telegraph office near; just appear." Now was our opportunity; the accidental sight of that sign-post had changed our programme, the only programme, however limited, we had made on the journey. Somehow I never expected we should keep it; pre-

arranged plans on a driving jaunt are doomed to failure; that is, for a man who loves to be free. To Bala we would go and hunt our friend up; Capel Curig must wait or be put aside altogether.

I had heard much, and read perhaps more, of the joys of a simple life in a cottage right in the heart of the real country, miles from any town; nevertheless, I had my misgivings about the reality of them. After the bloom of novelty had worn off, would they endure? Would they stand the trying test of time? With my friend, however, they had stood the test of three years of summers and winters. In living the simple life in a remote country dwelling —not the make-believe imitation thereof in a pretty cottage that "apes humility," with a convenient town and railway station not far off, and where the tradespeople punctually call each day—there are sundry unromantic details to be considered. How about the conveniences of such a life? How about servants, or a servant, as the case might be; if obtainable, would they, or she, stay? How about the butcher and the baker, for a man must eat if he has to live? How about society; would nature suffice, aided by an occasional visitor from the outer world, and would these visitors be tempted to come, or if they came once, would they come again? How about the many other conveniences, such as the daily paper, that one is apt to overlook in the first glamour of the new order of things; and how about a doctor? Of course I am writing of really remote spots where alone you can lead the simple life in its integrity.

Truly, I had been introduced to a lady of much

refinement who had led this life, alone with one maid, in an old-fashioned cottage remote in a purely pastoral country, with no society but farmers for miles around, excepting a prosy parson or two; a cottage ten good honest miles from a town or a railway station, about indeed as far away from so-called civilisation as one could be to-day in this crowded England of ours. The lady was neither old nor young; she had many friends, but had to face the world with an income woefully small, and she chose this quiet country life solely from purposes of economy; but after a year's trial of it she expressed herself as being perfectly happy and contented, though, I thought, without any great enthusiasm. The simple life can be very cheaply led, that is one certain advantage of it. The lady in question had secured a comfortable enough cottage, though it had no pretence of being picturesque; but there was a nice large garden attached, which, I was told, produced all the flowers for decorating the rooms, all the fruit for dessert, and all the vegetables needed for the table; there was, too, a small orchard at the end of the garden. I gathered that the lady was her own gardener, and enjoyed having the sole management of it, even to the digging. "A garden you attend to wholly yourself," said she, "you grow to love as a friend. You smile on it, and it smiles on you." And for this pleasant little home, garden, and tiny orchard, this follower of the simple life paid a yearly rent of under £30, the landlord doing all the repairs. And for the lovely view from its windows nothing was paid, a view over a succession

of green meadows sloping to the sun and the south, with here and there a little wood, and here and there in the distance a time-toned farmstead suggesting neighbourhood; a landscape that faded away from golden green to grey, and then melted into the blue of a long range of undulating hills. It was a stone cottage with a stone-slated roof; nothing about it was flimsy, even the floors and doors were of oak, and the latter opened with a latch; moreover, it had some delightfully roomy cupboards. Once an architect friend of mine showed me the plans he had made of a country house upon which he had taken great and special pains; he was proud of those plans, and considered he had designed an ideal dwelling. "The planning is excellent," I replied to his questioning, "but, to my mind, the plans lack one thing." "What is that?" queried he. "Cupboards," I laconically rejoined.

The interior of that cottage, which we were courteously shown, charmed us, so simply yet so artistically decorated and furnished was it; dignified, too, it looked; for simplicity of the right sort is always dignified. I even felt that a duchess might live there and not be ashamed. It is surprising at how small a cost you can make beautiful a cottage home, if the building has any sort of grace about it. A cheaply-built modern cottage is, I grant, a hopeless affair, for it is the very embodiment of meanness. This special cottage had, fortunately, brown-beamed ceilings, for it was built long years ago, and windows of leaden lattice panes that are so picturesque, so that neither ceilings nor windows needed anything

done to them beyond curtains to the latter, and a few flowers set on the sills to brighten up the room. The dining-room, of old the kitchen, was simply papered with brown paper, which formed a pleasant neutral background for odds and ends of blue china; indeed, after oak panelling, I think brown paper the best covering for a wall there is, so restful to the eye is it, and such an almost perfect foil to pictures, yet no covering could be cheaper. The rich man generally spoils his house, artistically, by spending too much money on the furnishing and the decoration thereof, especially the decoration that does not decorate, but merely worries the eye. The furniture of the room, made by some country craftsman of past days, had been picked up locally and cheaply, for the collector had not been in those remote parts. An oak dresser, dark with age, stood at one end of the room, and looked well with three long rows of earthenware plates displayed on the shelves in orderly array, and two genuine old "Toby" jugs on the top. Even though the plates were of the familiar ordinary willow pattern, yet grouped together thus they had an excellent effect. The walls of the narrow entrance passage were colour-washed a light grey, and on the stone floor some matting was laid. Facing you at the end of the passage was an old grandfather clock that gave the time to the small household, for there was no other timepiece, and no other was really needed. The living-room was lined with a packing-paper of a pale primrose tint, which gave the tiny chamber a sunny and cheerful appearance. I noticed there, too, an ancient

spinning-wheel discovered in a neighbouring village, and from the villager who sold it her the lady had acquired the almost forgotten art of spinning, which occupation helped usefully to while away the weary winter evenings.

But to return to ourselves. The road to Bala proved to be rough, hilly, and winding, but we expected these things of it, and were not disappointed. We were more than repaid for the badness of the way by the beauty of the scenery it took us through, scenery waiting for the tourist to admire it, for few, I take it, are the strangers who pass along that lonely road; but for a stray sheep or two we saw no signs of life upon it, and Welsh sheep stray everywhere, for no ordinary fence will bind them, much less a rough low wall.

Then presently the silvery gleam of Bala Lake came into view, with the wooded hills around doubled on its still surface. Bala, though the largest of the Welsh lakes, is hardly, I think, appreciated as its tranquil beauties deserve, possibly because it possesses no presiding peak, and so somewhat lacks in distinguishing character; it has only gently-sloping hills around, little varied in outline, pleasantly wooded at their base, but bare above. One generally expects to find a prominent peak rising more or less stately above a lake, and a lake without one suffers in the average tourist eye. But if Bala fails to present one striking *coup d'œil*, it boasts a thousand beauty bits along its wooded and rocky shores. If one looked upon Bala as a wide river in place of a lake, I feel sure it would not disappoint the most severe

critic of the picturesque, for with a river mountain peaks are not expected adjuncts. Bala is no show lake, but it is a very pleasant one; its key-note is peacefulness. It is the most English-looking spot in Wales I know, though it might not strike others so. One cannot always reason out the effect of a landscape upon the individual mind.

Coming to the foot of the lake, we took a by-road leading up to the hills, as we gathered from the recollection of a carefully-drawn sketch map of the locality our artist friend had sent us that this was the probable road to his cottage; anyhow, it would lead somewhere, and if only to a solitary farm-house, well, we could but turn back again; we felt in an exploring mood. Unfortunately there was not a soul about of whom to ask directions; even were there, it is not always easy to discover your way by asking in Wales, unless you have first taken lessons in pronouncing Welsh names from the written word.

Presently our narrow road forked in two, and at each fork it became narrower. Both roads looked as promising, or as little promising, as the other, so we called a halt to consider the matter over. Our travelling map was helpless. I had hopes of the road at the start, but was not prepared for this divergence; having climbed so far, it seemed a pity to go wrong. My friend had sent me a charming little sketch of his cottage, so that if I saw it I felt I should know it, but no cottage was in sight, though I climbed a spur of the hills above the road on the chance of getting a distant glimpse of it. Then a

strange thing happened. Some way off, upon a bit of rough moorland, we noticed a figure, clad in grey tweed, leisurely tramping over rough boulder and grassy hillock towards us. A fisherman, thought I to myself, for he was manifestly neither a farmer nor a shepherd, and who else would one expect to find on those wilds? So we determined to await his approach in case he might be able to direct us; possibly, too, he was surprised to see a car on that forsaken road, and guessed that we had lost our way. And behold it turned out to be none other than our artist friend trudging home after a day's painting! I know not which of us was the most astonished at the strange meeting. "Come at last," said he. "Now, this is friendly of you to drop in on us like this. Our one spare room is vacant; of homely fare there is no stint; pure water and Bass's ale are plentiful, and at our tiny table there is just room for other two." Such was the hearty welcome proffered to two wholly unexpected guests. Then after further mutual greetings, our friend jumped into the car (fortunately there was just room for him sitting on our baggage) and piloted us to his lone abode high on the hills above—a pleasant ending to the long day's pleasant journey.

Then at the crest of the hill, sheltered behind a wood of twisted, gnarled, old, and stunted oaks (a wood that suggested some haunted forest of Fairy-land, so quaint a look had it), we came to the secluded, substantial, stone-built cottage where our artist had made his home, and there with his wife led the genuine simple life with no pretence about it

—as out-of-the-world a life as perhaps one could live in Britain, unless one were a gipsy. Over the porch of an old-time home in the West Country is inscribed—

Welcome to come in,
As welcome to go by. 1620.

And I thought that this would be a fitting motto for my friend's doorway, for he loved a quaint conceit; only my host reminded me that there were no passers-by there, or rarely any, and what would be the good of a motto with no one to read it? By the way, writing of mottoes reminds me of a rather happy one we noted during the journey, on the front of an old coaching inn, and this is it:

You're welcome. What's your will?
Merry Wives of Windsor.

That night, after a long chat about art and many other things, we retired to rest, and opening wide our windows, gazed upon the mountains all around, dimly outlined in the gloom, impressive in their mystery, and how light, pure, and sweetly heather-scented was the air of the uplands that came wafted in to us; there was joy in the breath of it. I can always scent this delicious air, even though some distance off the mountains and wild open moors, when the wind blows towards me from them, just as I can scent the land when approaching it after a long sea voyage should the breeze be favourable. No sounds we heard but the space-mellowed murmuring of many far-away streams tumbling down the rocky steeps, and the liquid gurgling of a little

river in the valley below struggling with the boulders that impeded its course: there was no light from any human habitation showing in all the vast prospect. Truly, this was solitude! For all our eyes could tell, we might have been looking upon a primitive world where man had not arrived. We realised

> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

The next morning we set forth with our host and hostess for a long day's ramble amongst the hills, and a most delightful ramble it proved to be. Here was a remote corner of Wales unvisited, as far as we knew, by the tourist, who keeps generally to the well-beaten track of pleasure travel, and seldom relies upon his own resources, or cares or dares to make discoveries; yet that day's explorations revealed to us a series of romantic scenes as wildly beautiful as anything that Wales has to show, judging, that is, from my knowledge of its fairest spots; moreover, it was all charmingly fresh to us.

First, we wandered down the slope of the hill till we came to a little amber-coloured mountain river—it looked too dignified to be called a stream, as perhaps I should have called it—that gambolled and plashed along its rocky bed in a most enchanting fashion, filling the air with the sound of its liquid laughter, like the laughter of children when merrily at play. And was not this joyous mountain stream a child of Nature? We followed up the tumbling, foaming, falling water thro[illegible] a [illegible]oded glen, deep in green shade; and how lo[illegible]ely a Welsh glen can be, a glen

A WELSH MOUNTAIN STREAM.

that alone by its beauty would make the fortune of any watering-place! But this glen was only one of the many lovely spots revealed to us that day. We seemed to be passing through an endless picture gallery of landscape gems, till our eyes grew almost bewildered with so much beauty. Then as we rose we reached the open mountain side where the stream, grown narrower, leaped down the boulder-strewn steep in a succession of white-foamed falls. Here Nature was in her wildest mood, scarcely anything but grey rocks, broken and rent, water and weather worn, was visible, hardly a blade of grass was to be seen. But the glorious colouring of the lichen-painted rocks, the rare tints that time had given them, relieved the scene from savagery. Here was a cheerful solitude. Then we climbed on to the open moors above where the stream became a tiny rill; all around us rose a wilderness of rugged hills scarred and furrowed by the storms of ages. We were in a world of silence and space. Far away in the sheltered valleys below we caught a vision of many-tinted woods, with here and there a silvery gleam of water, and beyond of broken hills melting into blue, a vision wild and beautiful enough to satisfy the heart of the most passionate Pantheist. But what is the use of attempting to describe what cannot be described; and after all, it is not the actual scene that profits, but the impression of the scene that each beholder garners for himself.

My sojourn in that cottage, remote amongst the hills, afforded me a glimpse into the *vie intime* of the simple life led in its fullest simplicity. We stepped

out of the door into the real country at once. The country seemed to be but an extension of the house. We were as free of it as though it belonged wholly to us. We could in the morning stroll down to the river unobserved, and bathe in the clear, pure water of it undisturbed. And how much more refreshing and invigorating it is to take a natural bath thus in the glorious open air than in a stuffy room! "To wash in one of God's rivers," says Stevenson, "seems to me a sort of cheerful solemnity or semi-pagan act of worship. To dabble amongst dishes in a bedroom may perhaps make clean the body; but imagination takes no share in such a cleansing."

I came to the conclusion that with a sympathetic companion of like tastes the simple life could be lived with much happiness, and at a scale of expenditure which, compared to that of towns, seems startlingly small. I found that in the matter of supplies the trouble was not so great as I had imagined. The small farmers round a place (and even amongst the mountains farms are to be discovered) are generally only too glad to supply milk, butter, eggs, fowls, ducks, bacon, ham, vegetables, and even sometimes some of their home-made bread, and at prices that would seem to the average town-dweller impossibly low, to whom indeed such *fresh* eggs, milk, and vegetables are impossible. And vegetables fresh from the garden or the field have a totally different flavour to those bought in a shop. It may be fancy on my part, but a newly-laid egg in the country is to me quite another and a wholly superior article to a "newly-laid" egg in London

at thrice the price. The larder store was not limited, and its quality was excellent; trout, and even game at times, found their way there, and rabbits could be had galore. As for clothes, my host concerned himself little about these or the cut of them. A homespun suit served him both for week-days and Sundays. Anything else would have looked out of place, and not been half as comfortable, nor have worn so well. His top-hat and frock-coat were mouldering away in the attic. What use were they to him, who after three years of the quiet country life never desired to set his foot in a town again?

There we spent six red-letter days, and then were loath to depart, but we could not afford the time to linger longer, even in such pleasant quarters. I quite realise that there is a vast difference between spending a few days as a welcome and studied guest in a quiet and remote country cottage, where too the scenery around is of the romantic order, and doubly charms by its freshness, to feeling you are settled permanently down to live your life self-contained in an out-of-the-way corner of the land, "the world forgetting"; and here to some would come the sting —"by the world forgot." Moreover, though I would not openly acknowledge it, still I felt, and was happy in the feeling, that there was the ever-ready car at hand to whisk me away from this peaceful solitude the moment I might possibly be oppressed with it. A prison is no prison with an ever open door to escape therefrom.

CHAPTER XIII

Hotel visitors' books—Pont-y-Glyn, glen and falls—The vanishing past—Over the moors—A desolate spot—Seven miles of beauty—An old-time horseless carriage—The romance of the car—Amongst the mountains—Welsh weather—Scratched names on window panes—Our haunting past.

Bidding good-bye to our kind host and hostess, and to the simple life that we had so greatly enjoyed, we once more resumed our journey, and after a long, rough drive down the mountain side, followed by a stretch of decent road, we found ourselves in the pleasant little town of Bala. A sober enough town is Bala, but coming direct from the solitude of the mountains it seemed almost gay. We had not seen a shop for a week; and there we bought a London paper of the day previous. We were back in civilisation once more. Not that newspapers interested us greatly when on the road, for we had sufficient to occupy us with our own doings without bothering about those of other people, or about Parliament with its endless plague of politics.

At the ancient hostelry of the White Lion we pulled up to replenish our petrol supply. Not only in towns, but in many out-of-the-way villages in Wales the magic word "Petrol" may be discerned boldly displayed: such is the triumph of the motor

car. The old familiar notice "Accommodation for man and horse" is now much less frequently to be seen. Indeed to-day, even in wild Wales, it is much easier to travel by petrol than by corn. The landlady of the Lion kindly showed us over her ancient house, and some old oak furniture it contained, of which she seemed vastly proud, for she said that money would not buy it; but prouder still was she of the many notable people who had stayed there,—a real bishop amongst the rest, who had written some verses in the visitors' book. We thanked her for her civility, and she appeared astonished when we refrained from adding our names to the many in the said visitors' book. We explained to her that she had not been entertaining notables unawares.

Then we took a narrow lane that we were told would lead us again into the Holyhead road, and a very delightful drive we had through a charming country till we came to the lonely "Druid" inn, a small wayside house, though plainly marked in large letters on our Ordnance map, so that we expected to find an important old coaching hostelry. Here we rejoined the fine and smooth Holyhead highway, and fresh from our recent rough, cross-country experiences, we rejoiced in the goodness of it. After a pleasant stretch of wooded country, Pont-y-Glyn came in sight, one of the many fair spots of this famous road. Pont-y-Glyn consists of a single-arched grey stone bridge standing high on two precipitous rocks, which it joins together in one bold span. Here a wild mountain stream makes one

sudden plunge downwards of sixty feet or so into a wooded glen below. The old bridge, the foaming, sounding fall, white like milk in its rage, the steep, dark rocks on either side, the woods below, and the peep of rugged mountain tops beyond, make a striking picture. Here by the roadside on the crags a little circular walled recess has been built, in order to allow the traveller to whom haste is not everything a good view of the scene. Those old road builders had some thought of the picturesque. Fancy a modern engineer doing anything of the kind. In the days gone by, "when mortals had more leisure for the trees," the coaches used regularly to stop at Pont-y-Glyn for five good minutes to allow the passengers to admire the view. I wonder how many of the hosts of motorists who use this road do the same. When I come to think of it, though I spend much of the summer time touring, I can call to recollection no single instance when I have seen a motor pulled up by the way for the enjoyment of a view. Speed is the god we worship to-day. "La rapidité, voilà le rêve de notre siècle," says Théophile Gautier. Our eyes are on the destination, not on the journey. Now speed is a thief, for it robs us of many a fine pleasure. But to preach against speed is like ploughing the sands, and possibly to risk being called a Pharisee, as though I were thankful not to be as other motorists are. When a man buys a car, the first question he generally asks is "How fast will she go?" and when he gets his car he grumbles at being fined for "furious" driving.

As we progressed the scenery gradually grew open and barren, yet not without a wild beauty of its own, and in the heart of this deserted region we passed through the hard-featured, wind-swept hamlet of Cerrig-y-Druidion. Why or how it exists was a problem to us. In the old coaching days it was a necessity as a harbour for a change of horses —to-day you may obtain petrol there, though I should imagine the callers for petrol were few. Surely no wise motorist would run the risk of being stranded in such an outlandish spot for the want of that spirit. At Cerrig-y-Druidion there is nothing to detain the traveller, nothing worthy of note but its bracing air; but the quality of the air does not appeal to the eye. Still, there was something about the very gauntness and bleakness of the place that attracted us; it carried its bleakness to almost a point of impressiveness,—a subtle something that distinguished that desolate hamlet from any other of the kind I had ever seen. Even on that bright, sunshiny morning there was a keenness in the breeze blowing over it that reminded us of a chilly day in March when the wind is in the east.

Cerrig-y-Druidion, a Welshman told us, Anglicised means "The stones of the Druids," and being no Welsh scholar I trusted to a total stranger's translation as being correct; though later on our tour I heard two natives hotly disputing about the correct rendering into English of the very long name of a place, a name with ten letters and only one vowel,—I am glad I had not to ask my way to it. In Camden's time, at any rate, if ancient writers are

to be trusted, there were many so-called Druidical stones standing scattered about the locality. These have long since disappeared, doubtless used for building purposes, for there was a time when no one appeared to respect such prehistoric relics. Possibly even the monoliths of Stonehenge would have shared a similar fate only that probably they were too large to be conveniently removed and utilised for some base purpose.

Leaving Cerrig-y-Druidion, we passed through a bleak moorland, civilised only by our road and by the low, loose stone walls on either side of it, and before us our shelterless way stretched on in a straight, dreary monotony. Fortunately there were only five miles of it, but they seemed like ten. In winter weather and in summer thunder-storms the outside passengers on the old coaches must have had a sad time of it; even on a car it would be none too pleasant under similar conditions, but on a car you could rush the stage. It would be a hard-hearted constable who would hold up a car for exceeding the speed limit on a straight, deserted, and open road in a storm. I was told, though I am loath to believe it, that this especially safe bit of road is regularly trapped. "Highway robbery legalised," as an indignant motorist who was caught in a police trap called it. "I would much rather meet," said he, "one of the old-fashioned 'gentlemen of the road'; you might by chance best him, any way you had some sport for your money; now you get none."

As we proceeded on our elevated way we were

buffeted by the unrestrained wind that seemed like a strong giant at play, and none the less rough because invisible—a wind that whistled eerily amongst the boulders that strewed the moor, and caused even the hardy mountain sheep to seek the lee side of them for shelter. Little wonder that now and then, in the old days, a coach got blown over on this exposed stage, when the passengers had to walk; and I hope they enjoyed the experience.

Then suddenly a glorious prospect opened out before us of the tumultuous Welsh mountains. The day, though windy, was fine; the air was wonderfully clear, the sun shone down brilliantly, if not warmly, from a sky so purely blue that it would have done credit to Italy. I have never been before in Wales under such conditions of weather, a perfectly cloudless sky above and around from one horizon to another. To the south we caught a glimpse of Cader Idris faintly showing, and to the west of stately Moel Siabod, of lordly Snowdon, of bold Carnedd Dafydd, of rugged Y-Tryfan, in the order they appeared; these we recognised unmistakably, but there were many other peaks revealed amongst the great disorderly array that we could not name. To behold all these mountains thus, at one time, without a cloud or a suspicion of mist on any of them, must surely be a rare experience. Not that the prospect gained by the absence of clouds and mists; indeed, it suffered from the lack of mystery, the lack of sense of height and space that these afford. I look for clouds upon my mountains; a mountain without clouds or mists topping or wreath-

ing it seems to me as incomplete as a picture without a frame.

Ruskin once wrote disparagingly of our British mountains and lakes; and though he was but twenty-nine years old at the time, still I find it difficult, loving those mountains and lakes as I do, to excuse all the hard words he gave them. However, Time is a great teacher; it even taught the master to change his views, for Ruskin lived to love with a deep affection the very mountains and the little lakes he formerly so despised, even to the making of his home amongst them. An intimate friend of Ruskin, who often visited him at Coniston, told me that Ruskin in his old age was never weary of talking of the beauties of the Cumberland mountains, of expatiating upon the glories of the sunsets over Coniston Old Man, and upon the unending charms of the scenery around his dwelling. Yet in a letter to Miss Mitford, dated 1848, Ruskin wrote: "As for our mountains or lakes, it is in vain that they are defended for their finish or their prettiness. The people who admire them after Switzerland do not understand Switzerland — even Wordsworth does not." It manifestly did not appear to Ruskin that perhaps *he* did not understand our mountains; but a man cannot reason when in a dogmatic mood. Then he goes on to say, "Our would-be mountains are mere humps, lumps of boggy moorland, and our little lakes are swampy fish-ponds."

It seems strange to me that even young Ruskin failed to realise that beauty and grandeur do not belong to size or height alone, as though one

measured grandeur by the foot, or beauty by the mile. Grandeur consists of fine form and grave colour as well as of size. To boast of wealth is to be vulgar; to boast of mere size is equally vulgar. The stately shape of most of the Welsh mountains, uprising sharply to the sky as a mountain should, is eminently dignified, and to be dignified is to be noble; then the dark purple-blue and purple-grey colour of them—a colour shared by some of the Cumberland mountains, due possibly to their slaty formation—is strikingly impressive when those mountains are beheld under the gathering gloom of storm-clouds. When a mountain is hidden above in vapour it may be of any height your fancy conjures; and how few of our British mountains are free for long from clouds? You may stay three whole weeks at Capel Curig, as I have known a traveller to do, and not get a glimpse of the top of Snowdon.

Some twenty-three years after writing that letter to Miss Mitford, when Ruskin was lying ill at Matlock, he kept exclaiming, "If only I could see the Cumberland hills!" Then as he was recovering, with this longing still strong upon him, a strange thing happened. Linton, the wood-engraver, wishful to sell his cottage at Coniston and the few acres of land around, wrote to ask Ruskin if he would care to buy it. Ruskin was delighted at the unexpected offer. He answered, he tells us, "Yes, without even having seen the place, sent for my lawyer, and concluded the purchase." Then, as soon as he was well enough to travel, he went direct to Brantwood

and made it his home. I wonder if at the time he gave a thought about that letter he wrote to Miss Mitford those many years gone by.

At Pentre Voelas we left the bleak moorlands behind and began the seven miles' descent to Bettws-y-Coed—a seven miles of rare beauty, the finest bit of the Holyhead road, to my mind, though possibly most people would consider the drive up from Bettws-y-Coed to Capel Curig finer, as Snowdon comes into full view at the end of the stage. That one view of Snowdon, I grant, is stimulating, but from Pentre Voelas the beauty is sustained all the way; moreover, there is no suspicion of show scenery about it, and the glorious view one obtains looking down and over the romantic Lledr valley, with Moel Siabod rising grandly up at the head of it, is perhaps even a more perfect picture than the more famous one of Snowdon from Capel Curig.

The road led us gradually down the hill-side through shaggy woods and past great crags overhanging the way, with grassy slopes between scattered with broken rocks; rugged and steep slopes made gay with the gold of the gorse and the purple of the heather, rich colours broken by the sober greens of waving bracken and tangled-growing things. Here Nature was her own gardener, and a skilled gardener too, making bright and full of colour her chosen bits of ground; and storm as it may it does not hurt their beauty.

All the pleasant way down we had by our side the clear and sparkling young Conway, here more of a wild, careless mountain stream than a river,

falling from steep to steep, blue, tawny, and white with foam in turns, but no one thing for long, filling the valley and charming the ear with its liquid melody. Here and there it was crossed by a hoary stone bridge, and here and there it dallied in many a tranquil crystal pool, and everywhere it presented a picture to our gaze. We could easily have exhausted our unused supply of plates on those seven miles of changeful beauty, yet we never exposed a plate without having a picture before us.

At the end of the descent we found ourselves in Bettws-y-Coed, still a beauty spot in spite of the intruding railway that has done it much picturesque harm, and in spite of the many new buildings that have appeared in the once primitive and unfamed village. In the days of old, when the Royal Oak Hotel was but a modest inn, haunted almost wholly by tweed-clad artists and anglers, when David Cox painted its signboard, some say "to pay his reckoning," some say for the sport of the thing, Bettws-y-Coed was possibly the most lovely spot in Britain. Alas! the "fatal gift of beauty" has robbed it of its ancient retired homeliness and naturalness; the ubiquitous tourist and the cheap day-tripper now haunt it, and have driven the quiet-loving artist away. As for the fisherman, he still may be seen there, but not of the old style; the modern one looks as though he had stepped out of one of the illustrated advertisements you see in the sporting papers. I do not fancy he catches many fish.

Bettws-y-Coed of to-day fails to stir my pulse; it is now a prosperous touring centre. So we drove

on without a halt to Capel Curig, high amongst the mountains, where at any rate the railway does not reach, and where perforce the traveller has to arrive by road, as a genuine traveller should, and not be dumped down at a station as though he were a parcel. Even though he get there by a motor car, still he is a road-farer, and so something of the romance of the road clings to him. The car is too recent an invention for us to see it in its proper perspective; some day our descendants may even write of "the good old motoring days," and look longingly back to those picturesque times. Who knows? Even as early as 1828, when Gurney's steam carriage or omnibus had been invented and run on the road carrying passengers, there was an idea that a smaller sort of motor car would not be very long before making its appearance; for in the previous year we find Southey writing from Keswick to a friend of his at Bristol: "I live in hopes of having a steam carriage which will enable me to transport myself and family at reasonable cost. When this is effected, which is likely to be shortly, we will mount the vehicle some day, and when the water boils, steer for my native city." Over five-and-twenty years ago, when on a driving tour, at High Hesket in Cumberland, I came upon a toll-gate which had on it an ancient and much-weathered board inscribed with the list of tolls to be paid, and the last of these ran as follows: "For every carriage drawn or propelled by machinery, the sum of one shilling for each wheel." If there were no carriages "propelled by machinery" at the time the notice

was painted (the lettering was almost obliterated by rain and sunshine when we saw it, so old was it), why the toll?

Even a motor tour is not without its possible romance. You may be benighted on a lonely moor in a car; it may break down with you miles from anywhere, as I was assured when I bought my first car it was bound to do; and if you travel without a driver (who is a nuisance, taking up a seat, generally the best, hearing all you have to say, and so destroying all privacy), you must get the car on somehow yourself. There the romance comes in. A motorist who takes with him that ever-present and expensive nuisance a mechanic knows nothing of the real charms of motoring (I have never taken a mechanic with me yet), nor does he know anything of the joy and the personal pride in overcoming a break-down. That is the spice of motoring; the possibilities of an adventure lend a zest to a journey. Only it is wise before you go a-motoring not to tempt Fate overmuch, therefore you will first have a care to learn all about your engines and how to set things right when they go wrong. Thoroughly to enjoy a motor tour you must be your own mechanic, and trust to your own skill and your own brains, and like Jim Bludso of the *Prairie Belle* fame, you must love your engines; so your car becomes your slave, and it will be to you as clay in the potter's hands.

So passing through Bettws-y-Coed, we climbed the five miles to the old historic hostelry at Capel Curig, where erst our coach-travelling ancestors

were wont to take their ease and make merry over their old "Oporto." An inn of "many merry meetings," it has been called; and the present generation still take their ease there, only more soberly, with, I am afraid, none of the hail-fellow-well-met feeling engendered by the toils and the troubles of old-fashioned road travel. The journey happily over (for in the old days a long journey was considered quite a perilous undertaking), safely harboured in their inn for the night, our ancestors relaxed.

At Capel Curig we stopped for four whole days in spite of the phenomenal fine weather—for Wales, —during the whole of which time the sun shone brilliantly out of a cloudless sky. When I write we stayed there in spite of the fine weather, I write advisedly, for it robbed the wild scenery around of much of its charm and most of its glory; under the clear skies even Snowdon looked tame and uninteresting. As Coleridge remarks, "There are no goings on amongst the mountains under a clear sky." The hill streams had run low and looked dispirited; instead of noisily struggling with and leaping over the boulders that would impede their course, they meekly flowed round them; the torrents failed to roar except in a ghostly way. Without clouds or mists the mountains around had lost their mystery, and so their impressiveness. Quiet pastoral scenery demands sunshine; mountains demand clouds and storms.

I know of no finer sight than to watch the measured march of a summer storm across a rugged

mountain, its craggy slopes now purple-black in the shadowed gloom, then for a moment in a passing gleam of sunshine showing a mass of golden glory, so strong is the colour revealed, seeming all the stronger for the sudden contrast with the previous darkness, its just-born torrents streaming down its seamed and riven sides in milk-white lines. There is one thing about a mountain, so long as the clouds and mists gather about it, it is unfailingly interesting, changing its aspects continually when not wholly hidden from view.

That the weather we experienced was exceptional, I am fully aware; even the ostler apologised for it, "a week without a drop of rain to freshen things up, and the water so low and clear that the fish won't rise." I note, too, from the numerous remarks written, in verse and otherwise, in the visitors' books at various hotels, that the prevailing comments upon the Welsh weather therein made is not of its dryness. There are the verses that, according to the landlady of the "Lion" at Bala, a former Bishop of Wakefield had written in her book complainingly, thus:

The weather depends on the moon, as a rule,
And I've found that the saying is true;
For at Bala it rains when the moon's at the full,
And it rains when the moon's at the new.

When the moon's at the quarter then down comes the rain,
At the half it's no better, I ween;
When the moon's at three-quarters it's at it again,
And it rains besides mostly between.

Rather severe, but one is bound to believe a bishop; and other tourists in various other parts of Wales

express plainly, though less politely, the same views. When, many years ago, that famous trio, Charles Kingsley, Tom Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown's School-Days*, and Tom Taylor, were staying at the little lonely inn at Pen-y-Gwryd, at the foot of Snowdon, for want of better occupation they wrote a series of verses in the visitors' book there, of which I quote the first four as expressing their opinion of the weather. The initials at the head of each verse show by whom they were indited.

T. T.

I came to Pen-y-Gwryd with colours armed and pencils,
But found no use whatever for such utensils;
So in default of them I took to using knives and forks,
And made successful drawings—of Mrs. Owen's corks.

C. K.

I came to Pen-y-Gwryd in frantic hopes of slaying
Grilse, salmon, three-pound red-fleshed trout, and what else there's no saying;
But bitter cold and lashing rain, and black nor'-eastern skies, sir,
Drove me from fish to botany, a sadder man and wiser.

T. H.

I came to Pen-y-Gwryd a-larking with my betters,
A mad wag and a mad poet, both of them men of letters;
Which two ungrateful parties, after all the care I've took
Of them, made me write verses in Henry Owen's book.

T. T.

We've been mist-soak'd on Snowdon, mist-soak'd on Glyder Vawr,
We've been wet through, on an average, every day three times an hour;
We've walk'd the upper leathers from the soles of our balmorals,
And as sketchers and as fishers with the weather have had our quarrels.

The writers of these verses were more fortunate in suitable mountain weather than we were.

The little sitting-room at our hotel which we had allotted to us had many names scratched on its window-panes. I was glad to note there were none of recent date. Perchance people do not travel with diamond rings nowadays; any way, a visitors' book and pen and ink are generally provided for the tourist anxious to leave his name or his wit—save the mark—behind him, and good use is made of these. A wet day nearly always brings a demand for the visitors' book, and the effusions then concocted therein are the reverse in sentiment to the familiar lines Shenstone wrote at his inn at Henley. Amongst the number of unfamed names scratched on our window-panes (many bearing dates of nearly a century ago) we observed those of "Byron, July 1813," and of "Walter Scott, 14 May 1818." These may be forgeries; on the other hand, they may just possibly be genuine. I believe that Scott visited Wales and this particular hotel in the latter year, which, however, proves nothing. He may by chance—it is not unlikely—have occupied that very room, and he may even have scratched his name on that pane (famous people at that time did such a thing, Pepys amongst the number); at any rate we were in a happily credulous mood, and chose to indulge our fancy in the genuineness of both signatures. To do so lent an air of romance to the spot. Certain ancient chambers make a call upon the imagination, and of these ours was one. I despise the hard-hearted traveller who will believe in nothing

without positive proof, and of some things no proof can be given. When a supposed happening pleases me, and is probable, I gladly give it the benefit of any doubt. I only ask for reasonable probability, and then I rejoice to indulge my fancy. So when I come upon, as I often do, a fine old crusted tradition, I never examine it too critically. Why should I? Romance is the wine of life, and a moderate indulgence in it does no harm; he must be a sad soul who never sips of that wine. Besides, Scott once did scratch his name on a window-pane of Shakespeare's birthplace. When last there this was specially pointed out to me, and I was assured by the custodian that it was genuine. What a man has done he may do again. As far as my memory serves, the signature of Scott scratched on the window at Stratford-on-Avon closely resembles the one at Capel Curig. Unfortunately it never occurred to me to ask the landlady of the inn about these signatures, for if genuine, there might be some tradition about them.

As I sat down the next day to make a sketch of the rugged, old, and primitive stone bridge that stands just below the hotel where the little Ilyn flows into the river, I suddenly remembered that over twenty-five years before I had sat almost on the exact spot when I made an over-careful drawing of the same bridge, the stream, the boulders, and the hills beyond. On my return home, on comparing my last sketch with my former one, I found how little the scene had changed in all those changeful years. Apparently the very same boulders were

AN OLD WELSH BRIDGE.

there in the same places, and were the same in form; the distant mountains and hills around were as of old. The two sketches, as far as the eye looking at them could tell, might have been done on the same day, and this at a spot where the waters rush and strive when the stream is in flood—and it often is in flood—so that one might expect some observable change. Twenty-five years is the third of a long lifetime, yet how lightly it leaves its mark on Nature.

As I was making my sketch, memories of the past came to me unbidden. The presence of the old comrade, gone to rest, alas! those long years gone, seemed to haunt the spot, as though there but unseen. So real was this feeling, that I found myself listening for the voice that is hushed in the sleep that no man can waken. But no voice spoke; only the wash of the water broke the sad silence. Such experiences come now and then, I believe, to some of us when we revisit places where we have spent happy hours with a kindred spirit who can never be with us on earth again to make us feel the lovableness of life.

CHAPTER XIV

A Welsh market town—A shaking bridge—The Conway valley—The poetry of the ferry—A town of old romance—Abergele—Epitaphs quaint and curious—Rhuddlan Castle—A tiny city—Mold—Caergwrle Castle—The importance of the unimportant—Ellesmere and its story—A model public-house.

Leaving Capel Curig, we retraced our road as far as Bettws-y-Coed, stopping on the way to view again the picturesque, much painted and photographed falls at Pont-y-Gyfyng, one of the beauty spots of Wales. Leader drew this bridge in his famous picture of "The Old Holyhead Road," in my opinion the finest picture that artist ever painted. In spite of the many sketches made and photographs taken of this delightful old bridge and the romantic and rocky gorge below, there is one view of it, and I think the best, that appears to have been strangely missed by artists, that is the one to be obtained by climbing a little way the hill-side to the north of the main road. From this point you look down upon the beautiful old bridge, the tossing river above it and the foaming falls below, whilst the soft backing of woods makes a pleasing contrast with the shapely form of rugged Moel Siabod rising high beyond. That is a picture.

At Bettws-y-Coed we crossed the Llugwy by the

ancient Pont-y-Pair, where the tumbling mountain river makes its last tumble over some fine boulders and then loses its identity in the brimming Conway, their mingling waters running peacefully down the quiet valley to the sea. Thence by a pretty tree-shaded road we made our way to Llanrwst, passing by the ancient, and said to be haunted, hall or castle of Gwydyr. Llanrwst is an uninteresting and typical Welsh market town, with nothing to commend it to the traveller unless it be its big arched bridge, said to be designed by Inigo Jones, which bridge local legend declares possesses the singular property of shaking if you bump your back smartly against its parapet just above the centre arch. Unlike most legends, the truth or untruth of this one the traveller can test for himself. The bridge did not shake for us, but then we were afterwards told that we could not have bumped it hard enough, and that in the tourist season a sturdy Welshman generally stood waiting on the bridge who could and would make it shake for twopence. According to my experience, I should judge that man honestly earned his twopence ; and from what I could understand, a public-house not far off also profited by the shaking of the bridge, —doubtless thirsty work.

From Llanrwst we followed down the lovely Conway valley, a valley enclosed by wooded hills on either hand, and above the hills we caught a peep now and then of mountain peaks blue in the distance —as pleasant a drive as there may be in the land. Then we came to Tal-y-Cafn by the river-side, where once was a picturesque ferry, a favourite subject of

artists, who used to forgather at the comfortable little hostel there in the good days of old. Alas! the ferry is no more, a supremely ugly, if convenient, iron girder bridge having taken its place, painted a glaring white when we were there, so its ugliness was pronounced.

Alas! for the taste display'd
In this one bridge they've made.
Oh! it is sorrowful.

Make no deep scrutiny
Into its beauty,
Lightness and grace;
For it has none of them,
Not even one of them—
Summit or base.

So some years ago wrote a poet protestingly of an ugly bridge in the Midlands; his lines will equally serve anent the one at Tal-y-Cafn, and I make no apology for applying them to it.

Rural ferries, with their old and heavy rowing and larger boats that are worked by a rope, together with stepping-stones, are gradually disappearing from the land. They are undoubtedly inconvenient at times; but, oh! so picturesque, such charming features of the countryside, that one cannot but feel a pang at their passing. Personally I would rather suffer their inconvenience than have them improved thus ruthlessly away. I call to mind the song of Twickenham Ferry—

O hoi ye ho! Who's for the ferry?
(The briar's in bud, and the sun's going down)
And I'll row ye so quick, and I'll row ye so steady,
And 'tis but a penny to Twickenham town.

> The ferryman's slim, and the ferryman's young,
> And he's just a soft twang at the end of his tongue,
> And he's fresh as a pippin and brown as a berry,
> And 'tis but a penny to Twickenham town.

There is poetry, even romance, about an old ferry, but who would write a song of an iron girder bridge? Truly a flavour of romance clings to a remote and primitive ferry. Watching by the side of one, I am always expecting some strange belated traveller to hurriedly shout "Over!" and wake up the somnolent ferryman (sometimes the man is but a boy), a traveller whose business has some mystery connected with it, or maybe he is a fugitive from justice; but though I have often waited sometimes half a day and long into the evening at a sequestered country ferry I know, trusting for my mysterious stranger to appear, he has never appeared. Still I feel that he will surely come some day, though I chance not to be there. So do certain places impress certain minds. I even feel positively that there must be some unrecorded romance connected with that ancient ferry. Were I a novelist of the old romantic school I do not think I could resist the temptation to start my story at a lonely Fenland ferry I wot of, where there is no human habitation in sight but the ferryman's humble home—only a waste of green land fading away into the distant blue, and the oily-looking river close by. It would be a refreshing departure from the too familiar lonely horseman on the lonely road or moor, or the equally familiar suspicious stranger who suddenly makes his unwelcome appearance in the low-ceilinged

parlour of the little wayside inn. When I was a boy, a book that began in that fashion was the book that took my fancy.

Beyond Tal-y-Cafn the Conway widened out so that it resembled a continental river, and then the quaint old castled town of Conway came into sight on the opposite side of the broad water. The grey and gloomy castle on its bold crag, standing darkly forth against the bright sky, though broken by Time and mantled with ivy, still looked stern and impressive. Below the little town, to this day surrounded by its towered walls, looked almost medieval—a town of old romance. With half-shut eyes, so as to blur the view a little, we could, with small strain upon the imagination, have fancied we were medieval travellers looking down upon a medieval town. So much from this point of view has Conway preserved its ancient aspect—only the modern motor car would have to be conveniently ignored. Therein lies the art of the traveller in not seeing what he does not wish to see.

We did not go to Conway, having been there before, but took the coast road leading eastward, which afforded us wide and welcome views of the sunlit sea, that blue highway of the world. Soon we reached Colwyn, prosperous, progressive, and uninviting, its assertive modernity being in striking contrast with dreamy old-world Conway, blessed with ancientness and mutely musing over the centuries past.

Then after many ups and downs through a country pleasantly varied and made the more attrac-

tive by the near presence of the open sea, from which the refreshing breath of salt-laden breezes ever and again came wafted to us, we reached Abergele, a village whose name calls to mind the terrible and astonishing railway catastrophe of forty years ago, when thirty-three passengers on the mail train were cruelly burnt to death by the explosion of a petroleum-laden truck that formed part of it catching fire. A granite monument in the churchyard was erected to the memory of the victims; and in the wall opposite to it stands a weather-worn stone that according to local tradition bore an inscription in Welsh, now wholly illegible, that Anglicised runs thus:—"Beneath this stone lies a man who lived three miles to the north of it," that is where now the deep sea flows two miles from land, allowing that Abergele is one from the coast. Pennant, in his wanderings, refers to the legend that a vast tract of inhabited country extending northward had been overwhelmed by the sea. It seems strange that this epitaph should have been both nameless and dateless. I am afraid one can never surely rely upon an epitaph even at first hand, but when it comes to be repeated at second or third hand its reliability is at a vanishing point. Some epitaphs seem merely to have been composed to perplex posterity. "Here lies a man who never was born" is a perfect poser; so too is the often quoted one in the churchyard of Christchurch, Hampshire, that I venture to repeat because a friend has sent me a possible solution to its mystery. This then is the epitaph:—

We were not slayne bvt rays'd,
Rays'd not to life,
But to be bvried twice
By men of strife.
What rest covld the living have
When the dead had none.
Agree amongst yov,
Here we ten are one.

His guess at the solution of the riddle, that has bewildered many learned antiquaries, is, that at the time of the Civil War when the combatants seized lead for the manufacture of bullets wherever they could lay their hands upon it, even desecrating tombs for the purpose, the ten unfortunates were unearthed from different graves to obtain lead from their coffins, and that the bodies were afterwards ruthlessly reinterred in one grave. Whilst on the attractive subject of curious epitaphs, to be a little previous, I give here one to be found in Wrexham churchyard, which we came to a little farther on our way. It runs as follows :—

Here lies five babes and children dear,
Three at Oswestry, and two here.

Almost equal to one said to have been in a Sussex churchyard, I forget now which. Trusting to memory, the epitaph was in this wise :—

Here lies the body of John Dash, mariner,
Who died and was buried at sea.

A long stretch of level country, wild and wind-swept, open to the sunshine and the storm—a country conforming to no canon of beauty, yet with a certain indefinable charm of its own, a country of

fresh airs—brought us to Rhuddlan, a clean little wide-streeted town having a large crumbling castle standing apart from it. The towers of the castle are overgrown with ivy (that ruin-loving creeper which beautifies the scarred and barren wall), and bore a sombre look as though nothing could lighten their century-gathered gloom. But the castle is a mere shell, making a brave outward show, but vacant within, "all tenantless, save to the crannying wind," and the birds that find undisturbed nesting-places there. Its old story of struggles and fightings is finished, its brave warriors have long ago gone to their well-earned rest, now it is the very embodiment of peace. Its end is picturesque though undignified, for it has become a show place with admission charged at so much a head, enough to make those stern old warriors turn in their graves. Its chief attractions, except to the artist, are now historical, and to dip into that history I am not inclined. It pleases me not to be too learned; matter-of-fact history is sometimes dull, I seem to have heard it all before; what I love and seek for is some local legend, grossly inaccurate possibly, but that does not trouble me, connected with an ancient building and related on the spot by some one who believes in it, or professes to do so—

> Give me romance, I'll dispense
> With your stupid commonsense.

So I enjoy a good novel, though I know it to be pure fiction.

Leaving Rhuddlan's ruined castle, the character

of the landscape changed, and we drove through a quiet pastoral and well-wooded country to the city of St. Asaph. The tiniest city I know, with the exception of St. Davids, which indeed is but a village, and a poor and primitive one at that. St. Asaph, too, is little more; its cathedral is smaller than many a village church; its streets were deserted when we passed through, though when we came to the bridge that spans its tiny river and gives access to the place, we observed a notice boldly displayed, "Drive slowly through the city." St. Asaph stands upon its dignity; like some unimportant people, it assumes the air of being important. Such is the comedy of life. Its cathedral more resembles a large parish church than an ecclesiastical edifice boasting of so fine a title. Had it not been St. Asaph, we should have imagined that we were passing through a clean and pleasant village with rather a fine old church, yet not noticeably so. It is not the fault of St. Asaph that it is a city, but it seems a boastful title for so small a place to possess. One expects something of a city, unless it be in the Western States of America, when a few log huts may suffice.

Beyond St. Asaph we found ourselves in a country of green pastures and leafy woods, with low girdling hills around all steeped in sunshine. Surely we had wandered into Arcadia. As we drove on the hills drew nearer, and we followed down a lovely narrow valley with just room enough for a few scattered farms, our winding road, and a little meandering river that glided along through the

greenest of meadows. By the river-side we noticed, here and there, a cosy-looking little inn that could only exist for the angler, such "an honest" inn as would have delighted the heart of good old Izaak Walton, at least that was our impression from passing observation. Then tall chimneys met our vision; next some great gaunt buildings which they serve; the hill-side was scarred with quarries, the beauty of the valley had come to an end; not that it mattered greatly, for soon afterwards we were in the town of Mold.

What Mold is famous for, if it is famous for anything, I do not know; that is one of the disadvantages of travelling without a guide-book. Still, sometimes there is a pleasure in ignorance. Even Dr. Johnson did not know all things. (I wonder what he would have thought of a modern guide-book that does.) When a lady once asked the learned doctor how he could make such a deplorable mistake (it was about some unimportant detail), he boldly made reply, "Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance." When upon a holiday jaunt I do not seek to be informed; I travel purely for the pleasure of travelling. But at Mold as we stopped to replenish our petrol supply, I casually asked the man who dealt in petrol what the town was famous for, and he curtly replied, "Nothing." "Is there anything worth seeing in the place?" I next queried, and again he curtly replied, "Nothing." As he lived in the town, I thought he ought to know, so I accepted his estimate of the place, and we proceeded on our way.

We rejoiced to get into the quiet country again,

for Mold did not inspire us; the town itself struck us as being neither beautiful nor ugly, but simply uninteresting, and we travelled to be interested. A little beyond the town, where the real country began, we noticed by the wayside a delightfully picturesque old home, with mullioned windows, a big roof, and great stacks of clustering chimneys overgrown with ivy, a house that impressed our imagination as though there must be some story of the olden days connected with it; yet we passed it by without stopping, for we felt in a lazy mood. Sometimes it is well not to inspect too closely a spot that takes your fancy, for then your poetic conception remains undisturbed. In writing which I am endeavouring to make a virtue of our laziness. Wordsworth had a delightful vision of Yarrow, and he asked why by close inspection should he undo it. I feel grateful to Wordsworth for that saying of his, and the comforting wisdom of it.

Next through deep woods, whose cool green shade was welcome that warm day, we made our way into a more open country of low rounded hills dotted with dwarf oaks and splashed with heather, a country with a character of its own. Then a bend of the road revealed to us the pretty little village of Caergwrle, where we discovered the ruins of an old castle standing boldly, as a castle should, on a low but steep hill above it. The time-worn castle on its windy height looking down upon the lowly village below made a charming picture; a graphic reminder, too, of the long past feudal supremacy. I had not heard of Caergwrle or its ruined castle

before, so the coming upon it was one of the many pleasant surprises of our journey. An old castle gives to a place a sentiment of romance and a certain air of dignity. An old castle is an aristocrat among buildings, for it can claim a long descent; its fortunes may have fallen, but its pedigree is sure. Give me old churches, old castles, old manor-houses, old inns, old farmsteads, old cottages, and I would gladly dispense with most modern buildings that encumber the land with their ugliness. I asked an inhabitant the name of the village, and when he told me this, I innocently remarked that I had not heard of Caergwrle before. He appeared genuinely surprised at my ignorance. He even ventured to ask me where I lived not to have heard of Caergwrle. I told him Eastbourne. "Eastbourne!" exclaimed he, "I didn't know there was such a place." So we were quits in our ignorance, unless possibly that native desired to score off me for being unacquainted with the name of so important a spot as Caergwrle. Now I shall remember it on account of its ancient castle and its picturesqueness. To travel by road is to learn the geography of one's own country.

From Caergwrle to Wrexham we passed through a country abounding in collieries, and their presence did not improve the scenery. Unfortunately coal generally appears to lie underground when the scenery above is, or rather was, especially gracious, so we hurried on to get into a more beautiful district unblessed with minerals. We had no idea we were bound for Wrexham until a sign-post informed

us of the fact, so little did we trouble where we were going, so long as we were going. Wrexham did not detain us long; its fine church, which has some noteworthy features, appearing to be the only thing of interest in the flourishing town. But dim ecclesiastical interiors with their religious gloom had small attractions for us that day; the call of the bright sunshine effectually overmastered our antiquarian zeal.

Beyond Wrexham we found ourselves in the unspoilt country again and were free from collieries; a green and pleasant country it was; doubtless we enjoyed it all the more after our dreary drive into Wrexham. After all, ugliness has its use as a foil to beauty; but that is the only use I can discover for it.

Not far on our road, about five miles or so, we drove into a pretty, well-built village that charmed us greatly; its name I have forgotten, but its picturesqueness lingers pleasantly in my memory. Facing its wide street were some quaint old houses, and the pleasant half-timber inn there almost inclined us to stop and go no farther that day; but it was a day of days for the road, and half of it remained to us, so our roving propensities prevailed, and we went on. I have still a distinct recollection of a delightful, dreamy, old-world home of time-toned brick that stood at the end of the village with a great oak door and a weathered coat-of-arms boldly sculptured above in the stone of the porch. Truly the bloom of age had beautified it; but I think it must always have been a picture, for though

age will mellow a building, softening a harsh feature down here and there, and tint its walls with weather stains, it cannot give grace of form, or hide bad proportion, or make one feel the craftsman's hand where none has been.

Driving on, in time we reached Ellesmere, a pretty enough village with a pretty name derived from a little lake by its side. We had heard a great deal of the charms of this lake of old, so when we came upon it unexpectedly, as we did that day, and were disappointed, great was our disappointment. That is the sting of fame, whether in man or scenery, the reality has to compete with the ideal, and the ideal is prone to be exacting. Sometimes it is well to leave a spot unvisited, not to invite disillusion, as Wordsworth did, to refer to him again.

> And is this Yarrow? *This* the stream
> Of which my fancy cherished
> So faithfully a waking dream?
> An image that hath perished!

"And is this Ellesmere? *This* the lake," we exclaimed to ourselves, "that was to charm us so should ever our wanderings take us to it?" And yet we were seasoned travellers, making always due allowance for descriptive licence. Doubtless the mere was pretty, but its prettiness was that of a park lake. There were woods around it truly, but "desirable villa residences" were set amongst them. What a wayside cross was to a Puritan, what a red rag is to a bull, "a desirable villa" is to me; it is bad enough in the outskirts of a town, it is a horror in the country. I can understand a man, even a

nobleman, living in a cottage; but give me a log hut rather than a villa. Perhaps we were spoilt by the wild beauties of the Welsh llyns around Capel Curig. Anyhow, a constable loitering by the mere side, a fitting adjunct to the scene, for he did not seem the least out of place there, assured us that "the lake" was much admired, and that people came from far to see it. But then a man may be a good constable and yet no judge of scenery.

Some years ago a friend, learned in Shropshire lore, related to me the traditional origin of this mere, which I now repeat from memory. At the same time I must confess that the tradition has a familiar ring about it, as though I had heard it before of some other spot; for these old fables can frequently be traced to one common origin, with such variations as may be needed to adapt them to a particular locality. This, then, is what I was told of Ellesmere. Where the lake now is, once upon a time, as the familiar fairy stories conveniently put it, was dry land on which stood the lordly abode of a certain cruel baron—name not given, but that is a mere detail—to whose door came a beggar who craved a drink of water, as many a modern tramp is wont to do, though with no desire to obtain it, but in the hope of possibly obtaining something more to his liking, out of pity. The beggar was driven away, and he promptly turned round and cursed the baron, his wife, family, and the very place, just as a modern tramp might do under similar circumstances, only the curse of the modern tramp leaves nobody a whit the worse; but in the

old days things were different—according to tradition. The ancient tramp was sometimes a saint in disguise, it would appear, which seems to be a mean act on his part. I trust I have never met a saint on the road disguised as a tramp, and refused him the usual twopence to assuage his undoubted thirst. However, to continue the story, the next morning after the curse was uttered, the astonished country folk around woke up to find the baron's abode and grounds around had utterly disappeared, and only a sheet of water marked the place where once they had been. A pretty story with a doubtful moral, judging by the modern tramp, whose profuse blessings, when I have foolishly parted with my money to him, have profited me nothing; and whose curses, as profuse, when I have not so parted with it, have hurt me not. That is one of the advantages of living in modern times.

A motor car will swallow up the miles, if you let it. We did not indulge in any excessive speed, as far as I am aware, yet we seemed hardly to have left one village before we found ourselves in another. It must have been the pleasantness of the country between them that made the time fly so quickly by. The country had a lonely look, and we were giving ourselves up to its loneliness when we unexpectedly drove into Whittington again, though coming upon it by another road and in a different direction it put on a changed appearance, so much so that we might not have recognised it but for its ancient castle, which was unmistakable and gave us a friendly greeting. On entering the village we pulled up

under the cool shadow thrown by the church across the road. Above the windows of the church we noticed some improving texts painted that we had missed on our previous visit, probably placed there for the profit of the passer-by, surely a new departure in church missionary work.

Just across the way stood a clean-looking little inn, the windows of which were brightness itself. I presume the proper term for it would be "the village pub"; but it was so unlike the ordinary public-house that I feel compelled to use the pleasanter term of inn. I do not remember ever having seen a public-house that looked inviting to my eyes, but this one did, and as the day was hot and mortal man is sometimes thirsty, I ventured to enter it and "try the tap." I am glad now I did, for I learnt something from that visit. Within I found everything sweet, and neat, and clean. I drank my ale in a little sitting-room simply but suitably furnished, with refined and really good coloured prints upon the walls that would not have disgraced the smoke-room of a mansion. I was both pleased and surprised with all I saw, for this was not in the least my idea of a village "pub." A self-respecting woman might come here, I felt, for refreshment and not be ashamed. I enjoyed my rest in that cool and comfortable little parlour. I fancy that even some flowers were set on a table by the window, though I cannot trust my memory to assert this surely. I called for another glass of ale as an excuse to linger a little longer there, and have a chat with the tidy and civil-spoken man who

served me, and whom I took to be the landlord. Then I learned the secret of the place. He was no landlord, but a manager. The house, I was informed, belonged to "The People's Refreshment House Association," that owns or rents throughout the country over sixty such houses; and I wish the number were more. An excellent Association, in very truth, and it was run on these lines—I quote from a little handbook of the Association courteously presented to me :—

"Managers will be placed in charge of houses acquired by the Association to work them on the reformed system, the salient features of which are :—That the general arrangement and management of the house shall be on the lines of a respectable house of refreshment, instead of a mere drinking place. That food and non-intoxicant drinks shall be exposed for sale on the counters, and supplied to customers, on an equal footing with intoxicants, the latter being deposed from the objectionable prominence into which, from motives of profit, they are forced in ordinary public-houses. That all temptation to the manager to push the sale of intoxicants be removed by charging him at the full retail price for all alcoholics consumed, whereas he will be supplied with non-alcoholics at a price that will leave him a fair profit on their sale. Thus it will be to his interest to push the trade in non-intoxicants rather than in intoxicants." When to this is added the fact that the Association are careful to supply only the best quality of everything, I think it must be conceded that this well-considered

scheme of public-house reform is full of promise. I believe it was Lord Palmerston who said, "You cannot make an Englishman sober by act of Parliament." Some notable politician at any rate said so, and I feel inclined to add, it does not help to make an Englishman sober to supply him with insipid coffee and flavourless tea, and moreover to keep him waiting unduly for it, as publicans are prone to do, if they will provide it at all, when ale or spirits can be had without delay. Now I put one of these reformed public-houses to a personal test. When on the road motoring I entered one and ordered a glass of rum and hot milk, for it was a cold winter's morning. On giving my order I casually remarked I supposed I should have to wait some little time for a cup of coffee. It pleased me greatly to be promptly told that I could have one quite as quickly as the rum and hot milk, as the milk would have to be boiled. So I elected to take coffee, not without some misgivings as to its palatableness, for I am a trifle particular about the quality of my tea and coffee. A cup of hot coffee was duly served without needless delay. And nicely served too, with hot milk and sugar; and there is much in the way an article is served. Moreover, I thought the coffee good; it certainly was very welcome. I have truly tasted better—in France and at my own home; but I have tasted coffee no better, and sometimes worse, at a first-class and expensive London hotel. Then again I had to pay less for it than I should have done for my rum and hot milk; and some people may possibly not be so particular as to the flavour of their

coffee as I am, for in this matter I frankly confess I am a trifle epicurean. What I realised was the readiness, I might almost write eagerness, of the manager to supply me with coffee in place of an intoxicant. Therein lies the supreme virtue of the clause already quoted, "That it will be to his (the manager's) interest to push the trade in non-intoxicants rather than in intoxicants." Were all public-houses carried out on these lines, I, at least, should not blush to be seen in one. Heartily I wish the Association every success, and if any word of mine could help it in its task, gladly would I give that word.

CHAPTER XV

Through Central Wales—In search of an inn—An evening drive—A quaint old market hall—The first town on the Severn—Guides—A disused railway—The Upper Wye—"The highest church in the world"—Wild scenery—The secret of the hills—Radnor Forest—The charm of the moors—A ford—Knighton.

Leaving Whittington by the only road of the four that centres there we had not travelled, for we had already entered it twice and left it once, in a few miles we found ourselves at Oswestry, a pleasant little town, though, as far as we could discover, it offers no attractions to the tourist. So we proceeded on our way, just driving through it, trusting to the fortune of the road, as we had trusted to it throughout our journey. "Where are we going to next?" exclaimed my wife. What reply could I make but that I had not the least idea; indeed, it was rather a pointless query, for we never, or very rarely, had an idea where we were going, or where our night's quarters might be. The Fates led us in a southerly direction, along a fine smooth road and through the heart of Central Wales, a country that in spite of its beauty is strangely neglected by the tourist. The whole way we had on the right of us the dim outlines of the rugged Welsh mountains; to the left of

us were a long line of hills of lower elevation, but fine of form; between them lay a green and fertile country, watered with many streams, and dotted with numerous stone farm-houses of the familiar Welsh type.

At a little village (Llanymynech we made it out to be from our map) we noticed some picturesque cottages, and a fine precipitous hill close by formed a striking feature in the landscape. The village was inviting, and as the day was growing old we kept a good look-out for a promising inn; but if one were there, it escaped our notice. However, the weather was so fine and the country so interesting that we felt in no hurry about the matter, so we contentedly drove on till an inn should materialise.

Soon afterwards we found ourselves by the side of the silvery Severn, here having all the character and the rush of a mountain stream rejoicing in its youth. We followed the river up through a charming valley, both river and valley growing narrower as we proceeded, and the mountains ahead growing wilder and wilder, bare and bleak Plynlimmon looming large over all. So we drove on, passing as quickly as we could through flourishing and uninteresting Welshpool, where the flannel industry is much in evidence; then next we came to Newton, a town of the same type, but smaller. We were almost inclined to stay there the night, for it was growing late; but we decided to drive on, hoping still to discover a country inn, as we had been vainly hoping for long miles past. Surely, with the fishful Severn close at hand, thought we, there should

somewhere be an angler's hostelry, though it had been long in appearing.

We drove on in faith, but no angler's hostelry could we see. The pretty village of Llandinam offered us no hospitality; so we lighted our lamps and went forth in the shade of dark woods, through a country that in daylight I should imagine was exceedingly beautiful. No wayside inn, however, shed through its windows or open door a ruddy light of welcome athwart our road. The lonely wayside inn and the possible romance of it was not for us that night. Still, the spell of the gloaming made our stage a delightful one. A sense of mystery lay over all the landscape; the dark and gloomy woods might have been enchanted forests; in the uncertain light the grey crags assumed the forms of feudal keeps, and here and there a solitary farm-house did duty for a moated grange, haunted of course. Being in a sentimental mood, we let our fancies have their way; we conjured up for ourselves the things that we would. So we drove through a land of old romance of our own making. There is a peculiar fascination in the illusions one creates for oneself, illusions that transform a commonplace world into a beautiful dreamland. "Out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples arise, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles," wrote De Quincey. The stillness of the hour was impressive, the only sounds we heard were the sighing of the night wind in the woods, and the quiet wash and plash of the river, sounds that would go on though the world were uninhabited, for they have nothing to do with humanity.

So with the evening star we arrived at Llanidloes, where we fortunately found a comfortable inn, a warm welcome, and much civility. For the first time during our journey we slept at an inn that had no garden; but as the good-natured landlord said, there was an extensive stable-yard at the rear of the house, and we were quite at liberty to stroll about in it! The next morning revealed to us that Llanidloes was not exactly an attractive town; indeed, there were only two buildings in it that interested us at all. Opposite our hotel stood a fine new town hall, aggressively new, with a tall clock turret rising boldly above its high-pitched roof, fretting the sky-line, a building manifestly intended to be picturesque, and it achieves its object; still it gave us the uncomfortable feeling that its picturesqueness had been striven for, and to feel this was to destroy its pleasantness. *Ars est celare artem.* Moreover, it sinned to us in the lack of local colouring; it would have been equally in place, or out of place, we thought, in any town from Berwick to Penzance. Yet if I could design any building half as well, fame and fortune might be mine. It is so easy to criticise, any fool can do it, and who made me a judge of architecture? But I do wish architects would give us buildings smacking of the soil on which they stand, using stone in a stone country, flint in a chalk district, half timber in a wooded land, brick where clay is, but only the thin "Dutch" brick; and always a roof of stone slats, tiles, or the silvery and greeny-grey thick Cumberland slates.

The other building was the ancient half-timber market hall, a simple structure needing no clever architect to design it, being clearly the work of a skilled craftsman seeking only for suitableness, having no pretence of being picturesque, yet it pleases the eye from the very absence of all pretence. It does not demand to be admired, yet you admire it and can hardly tell the reason why; possibly because it is so restful, with its long horizontal line of roof so directly contrasting with the upright lines of its timbering, a roof broken only by a little unassuming belfry with a useful weather-vane above. From this belfry until of late, we were informed, the curfew was tolled. We were sorry to hear that it is tolled no more, for these time-honoured customs once gone are gone for ever. Each link with the picturesque past that is broken can never be reforged again. The arched space below makes a convenient gathering spot for the townsfolk; a sort of out-of-door club where all may meet on a common footing, where too they may rest awhile and chat sheltered from the rain, or on a hot day from the burning sunshine. Modern town halls afford no such friendly sheltering spots; they err on the side of stateliness, a sort of stand-off stateliness; the one remark about them that comes naturally is, "What a fine building."

These old market halls possess the flavour of simpler times, they strike a modest note. Show is a quality that threatens to submerge us all one day. It is show that makes men live in pretentious and badly-built villas instead of in pleasant and well-built cottages. The villa is simply a residence, the

THE OLD MARKET-HOUSE, LLANIDLOES.

cottage a home. It is show that has turned the restful living-room into the unrestful drawing-room, not a room to withdraw in, a room that exists for the sake of Mrs. Grundy. "What will Mrs. Grundy zay? What will Mrs. Grundy think? Why dan't thee letten Mrs. Grundy alone." The room in my home that does duty as a drawing-room is oak panelled. Mrs. Grundy is not dead; she called on me one day, and a very superior person I found her. She told me, unbidden, that the walls of a drawing-room should be papered with a bright paper, not panelled. I replied, "Bother Mrs. Grundy," and Mrs. Grundy was shocked, poor old lady. Was it not Mrs. Grundy who once remarked she could not bear to see a "dodo" running round a room?

Llanidloes boasts of being the first town on the Severn; what else it has to boast of I know not. I think it has missed its opportunity of having greater fame than that, for the beautiful and varied scenery around would surely make its fortune as a watering-place. Not far away is lone Plynlimmon, that affords endless wild rambles and scrambles, though there are bogs on it to be avoided; then there are breezy, heathery moors about, and here and there a lonely llyn may be found; there are, too, some fine falls that well repay searching for; to say nothing of the two charming rivers, the Upper Severn and the tumbling Clywedoc, flowing fresh from the hills, and worthy of being explored to their sources in the solitude of the mountains, besides shady woods that make delightful wandering.

Nor is it a land without traditions. There is a weird tradition connected with one of the llyns, and a host of legends already exist about the countryside; and should Llanidloes ever become a tourist centre, more, if needed, could readily be invented according to the demand for them. One or two spots are quite suitable for the inevitable Lovers' Leap, and I fancy there would be no difficulty about providing a haunted house, especially if admission at so much a head were charged to view the haunted chamber. A haunted house is quite a profitable possession if within handy reach of the tourist. Indeed, I know a case where a house so reputed became such a paying concern that a neighbour in the same village started an opposition one. Only, to ensure success, the house must look the part and be at the very least a century old; two centuries are much better, three better still; a low beamed ceilinged and mullioned windowed room is almost a necessity, and if it be panelled that is an added advantage. Given these settings, it is quite easy to start the haunting. Some one in the house conveniently sees the ghost, he or she relates the occurrence in a startled manner to the villagers, after which the reputation of the house is made, nor will the villagers ever let it drop. But even villagers demand that the house shall be old.

At the foot of the town the two rivers meet close by an old grey bridge of three shapely arches, about which bridge there too is a legend. But the charm of the spot was spoilt by a lot of refuse having been

dumped down by the water-side. Ruskin, writing of Carshalton in his *Crown of Wild Olives*, says, "The human wretches of the place cast their street and house foulness; heaps of dust and broken shreds of old metal; which, having neither energy to cart away, nor decency enough to dig into the ground, they thus shed into the stream, to diffuse what venom of it will float and melt, far away, in all places where God meant those waters to bring joy and health." I think the people of Llanidloes would have been wiser to have invested in a dust destructor before erecting a new town hall; the town hall is not so beautiful as their river.

Strolling to the ancient market hall, I discovered there an old man sitting on a large worn stone that abutted on an end pillar of it, and I got a-chatting with him. He told me that on the very stone on which he was sitting, Wesley used to stand and preach to the people. He appeared quite anxious to impart this bit of information to us, "being strangers, I thought as how you would like to know it. Everybody knows everybody else in Llanidloes, and that's how I knew you were strangers," he explained. I stopped and chatted some time longer with him, in the hopes of learning further local happenings, but that fact appeared to be the sum of his history of the place. "Nothing special has happened in Llanidloes since then," he said, "as far as I'm aware." "A rather uneventful place," I remarked. He agreed, adding "It's a rusty spot," whatever he might mean by that; and seeing no chance of profit in extending the conversation, we went our way, which took us

to the old church that stands apart at one end of the town. The tower of this is simplicity itself, being square and of rough masonry, without buttresses or any ornamentation, and is surmounted by a plain square belfry. A rugged structure, picturesquely primitive, that harmonises with the wild landscape around. The church door was locked, but as we were about to depart, a woman, key in hand, came hurrying to us, a little out of breath with her exertions. She explained she had observed us walking up to the church, and being strangers (strangers appear to be marked people in Llanidloes), thought we might wish to see inside it—also I imagined her thoughts were about a possible tip. She certainly had done her best to earn one. Within we were surprised to find a carved oak roof adorned with the representations of angels and shields, and some curious pillars, "worth seeing" as the woman said. "The roof and pillars were brought from some old abbey a long way off," but the name or the whereabouts of the abbey she did not know, "having been here only four years, which isn't long enough to know everything." "Only four years!" Had we been aware that she had been there only so short a time we should not have expected her to know, we explained. But our satire fell upon stony ground. We also noticed an ancient helmet and a spear hanging on the wall, blackleaded to prevent them from rusting; but neither did our guide know anything about these, except that they were very old, a fact that we were competent to judge for ourselves,—but

we desired their story. As a guide that old body had her business to learn; she knew little, and invented nothing.

From Llanidloes we drove to Llangurig, a little lonely village surrounded by hills. Our road followed by the side of a long disused railway, its track grass-grown, its rails rusting away. There were bridges over it, and cuttings through which the line runs, or rather ran, to its destination at Llangurig. An excellent scheme for the unprofitable investment of money, for one could hardly imagine that so primitive a village would ever have provided enough passengers to pay for even the fuel of the locomotives; it could hardly have been intended for a mineral line, for we gathered that there were no minerals in the district. We were informed that the railway had been in that derelict state for over thirty years; it had not even a name.

At Llangurig we came upon the Upper Wye, there little more than a frolicking mountain stream, for it had only recently left its lonely birthplace amongst the mountains. From Llangurig we followed the stream down a narrow valley from which the hills rose steeply on either hand, leaving only a way for the tiny river, the road being cut out of the hill-side. Bare and rugged were those hills above, but below by the stream green and gracious woods softened what otherwise would have been an austere prospect. It was a mountain pass in miniature, and often a miniature is more beautiful than a bigger thing, and always more lovable. The valley happily escaped the severity of mountain bleakness and the cloying

sweetness of mere prettiness. Every few yards a new picture was presented to us, some fresh combination of rock, wood, hill, and tumbling river. Everywhere the colour was glorious, the bare hills were orange in the strong sunlight, and a deep purple-grey in shade, their lower slopes were splashed with the wine-red of heather and the gold of the glowing gorse that both flourished where nothing else appeared to grow, and the many-tinted woods and the blue Wye, amber where it dashed over the boulders that strewed its course, completed the picture. A feast of colour.

For ten miles we drove down this narrow valley to Rhayader, and the only living thing we saw on all those ten miles of beauty was, here and there, a stray sheep on the steep hill-side, unless the river might be counted as a living thing, for it had both movement and voice. A winsome little river it was, a "princess of rivers," with all the joyousness and freshness of youth about it; a river that gambolled, and laughed, and sung on its way, now tumbling and plashing amongst the lichen rocks, now gliding along at a gentle pace, now resting in a tranquil pool, as a child might rest after a long romp, just to refresh itself that it might romp the more. Dr. Johnson went to far-off Abyssinia to find his happy valley. More fortunate than he, I found my happy valley here in my own country.

At one long-to-be-remembered spot, where the tiny and shallow river was crossed by some stepping-stones, and a little below by an old bent wooden foot-bridge, we tarried awhile to leisurely drink in the

ON THE WYE ABOVE RHAYADER.

beauty of the scene. The simple rustic bridge with its background of steep mountains, so steep that one had literally to crane one's neck to see the sky, the overhanging trees with their twisted roots, and the short stretch of quiet gliding river, a river of water so clear that we could see every stone in its bed below, made an alluring picture. Some of the charm of this my photograph, here reproduced, may give a hint, but merely a hint; for the rich colouring of the scene is wanting, and the poetic mystery of the deep blue-purple bloom of the distant mountain side is not even suggested. But you cannot put poetry into a lens; some artists too cannot put poetry into their paintings.

How restful it was to sit there on the rocks and listen to the lulling murmuring of the rippling river, and the faint far-off sound of its tiny cataracts above and below us. It was all so peace-bestowing. I have grown tired of cities, for I know all they have to tell me by heart; but the hills and running waters have always some fresh message to convey. Nature is never stale, never wearisome. We live to-day too much in a crowd, we cannot bear solitude, much less understand its charms. We cannot even find time to realise the thoughts within us. We have no leisure. We reserve our admiration of Nature to the painted pictures of her; Nature herself leaves us cold.

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
> Little we see in Nature that is ours.

We passed through the sleepy little town of

Rhayader without a halt, for we saw nothing there to halt for, and were soon again in an open country of high green hills. On the road we overtook a man on horseback with two big milk cans, one slung on either side of him, a primitive, and to us a novel method of conveying that article. We wished to take a snap-shot of the man, but his cob objected to the car, and the man uttered something in Welsh at us that did not sound polite, so we desisted. I almost regret now that we did not brave his anger, for he and his cob and milk cans altogether looked so quaint.

Presently on the side of the hill to our left we espied the straggling hamlet of Nantmel, with its ancient church standing high above it, and a little inn below by the roadside yclept "The Seven Stars." We had asked a man the name of the place, and after he had told us it, he remarked, pointing to the church, "That's the highest church in the world." For the moment we thought the man must be a lunatic, or drunk, yet he looked sane and sober enough. Then before we had quite recovered from the surprise of his sudden and strange statement, he proceeded, pointing at the same time to the inn sign, "It must surely be the highest church in the world, for it is above the stars." Then we grasped his joke, doubtless an ancient and familiar one in those parts. He further informed us that the ale at the "Seven Stars" was to be relied upon. He thought we might like to know the fact, for it was a thirsty day. All days appear to be thirsty days to the countryman. However, we parted with the usual

twopence, for we thought perhaps the tale about the church was worth it.

The scenery was wild, but not specially interesting; however it improved as we dropped down to Pen-y-Bont, where we crossed the river Ithon by a neat little suspension bridge. The road ahead appeared to follow along a valley with steep hills on either side, but we noticed a by-road branching off to our left that apparently climbed up right amongst the mountains. Beautiful though the scenery had been of late, it had been valley scenery; the valleys had held us in thrall too long, it would be a change to mount out of the lowlands, to get upon the breezy uplands, to raise our horizon, to learn the secret of the hills. We hesitated for a moment whether we would take it or not, for Welsh mountain roads are not always of the best. Personally I did not fear the hills, for from past experience I knew that my brave little car would tackle anything short of a precipice; but I had a thought for my tyres. Still, exploring is the chief charm of travel, and what was the use of a car if we could not explore with it? The tyre is the Achilles' heel of the motorist. Now the journey is over, I may state that though it was long, our roads in places rough and stony, and often very hilly, we had no tyre trouble on the way, not even a puncture. If only we could have foreseen this! Some one somewhere says, who or where I cannot now remember, that "it is a blessed thing we cannot see into the future"; but surely that depends on what that future may be? To know everything that is going to

happen to you is, I grant, to take all the zest out of a tour, to destroy all the pleasures of anticipation; but to know that your tyres will not puncture, or that your car will not break down far from anywhere, could by no possibility detract from the joys of a journey.

We took the by-road, which at once began to mount, nor did it cease mounting for miles, and it took us into a moorland solitude. High up though we were in the world, a company of rugged mountains rose higher still around, and the great white clouds that came sailing by overhead seemed at times almost as though they would droop and touch us. Sheep, of the hardy Welsh breed, were the only living things we saw. Though we passed by one or two lonely, whitewashed farmsteads, there was no sign of life about them, not even a dog to bark at us, nor a blue film of uprising smoke from their chimneys to tell that they were inhabited; indeed, I think these deserted-looking dwellings rather added to than detracted from the desolateness of the prospect. But the sheep inconvenienced us not a little, for by some strange perversity in their nature they clung close to the scanty herbage of the roadside, when they had the whole of the wide moors to ramble over, without so much as a fence to bid them nay. This peculiar preference of the silly sheep caused us some delay and much annoyance, for on hearing the sound of the approaching car they, without exception, on whichever side of the road they chanced to be, slowly proceeded to cross the road right in front of us. Those on the right crossed

over to the left, and those on the left crossed over to the right, and this they did every time unfailingly. Still, there was nothing to do but wait their pleasure; they were masters of the road; in the old days they even delayed the mails. But at last the sheep ceased from troubling, because there were no more of them to trouble us. So we opened the throttle and bumped along the uneven road. A friend told me the worst of a motor car is that you can get no exercise in it, but he only kept to the smooth highways. We managed to get plenty of exercise in ours when crossing those moors. It was not good for our springs, it was not good for the car, but it was good for ourselves, which was a consolation. You can generally find some consolation in adverse circumstances if only you seek hard enough for it.

On consulting our map we found that the wild country we were passing through was Radnor Forest. Like the Royal Forest of Dartmoor, Radnor Forest is practically a treeless waste of wind-swept open moors and rugged hills, a land of health if not of wealth. The ancient term "forest" did not imply a tract of land covered with trees, for according to Wise and other authorities it meant a wide, open, unenclosed, and uncultivated space. There is a story told of an English tourist in Scotland who, on being shown a deer forest, innocently asked, "But where are the trees?" "Trees!" exclaimed his Highland companion, "wha ever heard of trees in a forest?" The moors and hills of Radnor have never been tamed by cultivation; though in the heart of thronged and civilised Britain,

they have retained their primitive wildness unchanged through unrecorded ages—

> They drank the dew
> When time was young and the world was new,
> And wove its shadows with sun and moon
> Ere the stones of Cheops were squared and hewn.

It is not necessary for the Briton to go abroad for wild scenery. Byron wrote, "I assure you there are prospects in Derbyshire as noble as any in Greece or Switzerland"; and there are prospects in Wales as noble and as wild as any in the land.

Strong was the breeze that swept unrestrained down from the hills and over the moors, and tossed the clouds about above; keen and almost wintry was the breath of it. We were not surprised to find from our map that we had ascended to 1200 feet. We had our fill of mountain air; and truth to tell, it made us ravenously hungry; and there is a joy in honest hunger when you can promptly satisfy it with the ready contents of a luncheon basket. When you cannot, your pleasure in the finest scenery is apt to pall. I never knew a hungry man who was a good judge of scenery unless there were an inn in sight. At last our road ceased to climb, and we began a long descent, a wide wild prospect opening out ahead of a wilderness of hills fading away into blue space, a blueness that made one realise the visibility of the atmosphere that is supposed to be invisible. The distant hills were not clean cut against the sky and sharply defined like those of southern climes, that seem to rush at you and rob you of miles of space. "The horizon wall did not

have the appearance of having been just washed and scrubbed down." It had the blessed sense of mystery. The indefinite always charms more than the definite; it allows scope for the imagination. The joy of a scene lies not so much in what the eye actually sees as in what it desires to see, and in mystery it may find its desires.

At the foot of the descent we espied the little hamlet of Bleddfa built on the hill-side, with an ancient church above it, a primitive building having a rough stone tower, topped by a wooden belfry black with age. And how well the primitive fane, unarchitectural and unpretending, suited the rugged landscape. A more peaceful or a more remote-looking hamlet I have hardly ever come across, wall-girt as it is by the hills around from the outer world and the worry of it. It gave us a feeling of isolation quite as profound as that produced by the sight of a lone log hut in a Far West Canadian clearing. Indeed, in the Far West the solitude is tempered by the fact that there you realise that man is conquering and altering the face of Nature. Here the moors, like the sea, seem unconquerable by him,—as unchangeable as Time itself. The western clearing you know will soon be covered by golden seas of waving corn; but the centuries come and go and the moors are still the same,—a fact to be grateful for in this restless world of never-ending change. Some one has termed the moors "unfinished scenery." Why unfinished? Nature manifestly never intended that they should be more finished than they are. Like a great artist, some-

times she makes a rough sketch and is content with it. Nature is never groovy, for her moods are many.

A little beyond Bleddfa we crossed a mountain stream by a shallow ford, the first ford on the journey, and we rejoiced in the picturesqueness and the romance of it—more perhaps of a water-splash than a ford proper—but just then, I fancy, the stream was running low. After the crossing followed a long ascent, and gradually the wild moor-lands lost their wildness and ceased to be. Scattered woods climbed the hills, here and there stone walls enclosed portions of rough pasture; though not wholly tamed, the landscape bore a more gentle look. In time we reached a spot where our road tumbled down—that, I think, well expresses it—the steep hill-side, and there far below in the valley before us stood the quaint little town of Knighton, perched on an isolated eminence that rose boldly out of the wooded valley.

We had now come to a country of woods and green fields, though round about and above the bleak hills showed their savagery. Gleaming white in the sunshine, the houses of Knighton, perched on their height, gave the town a distinctly foreign look; yet were I asked what foreign land I had in mind, I should be perplexed to give it a name. Our road did not lead us direct to the town as we expected it to do. I know not why—perhaps we somewhere took a wrong turning—for it seemed a silly thing of the road to avoid the town by less than half a mile after its long and lonely wanderings over bleak hill

and desolate dale. However, we had to drive back that distance to obtain a glimpse of Knighton, for the road we were on led directly away from it.

At Knighton we took the precaution to replenish our petrol supply, and we asked the vendor of that needful article if there were anything of special interest to see in the place. He responded, "I don't think so. There used to be a castle here, but that was pulled down ages ago. We've got a church, but it's not very old. It's a dull town is Knighton." Now, a castle that has been pulled down ages ago has only an historic interest; I want a castle to look at. A modern church I would not go a yard out of my way to see. Knighton is a disappointing town; it looks so anciently inviting from a distance, but a close inspection of it reveals nothing noteworthy; yet it has a look of pleasantness. A town that pulls down its old castle deserves to be snubbed by the tourist.

CHAPTER XVI

The valley of the Teme—A land of peace—A sleepy spot—Frugal fare—Wigmore Castle and its lords—Wayside history—An ancient battlefield—An old-world village and home—Clipped yews and formal gardens—Hereford—A quaint sun-dial—Churcham.

From Knighton our road led us along a green and well-wooded valley down which the silvery river Teme, a troutful stream by the look of it, made its winding way, the grey road and gleaming river never being far apart. It might have been a valley in Arcadia, so beautiful and peaceful it was. We were leaving the rugged hills behind. In spite of its rural pleasantness, however, contrasted with the wild moorlands we had so recently been among, the country had a tame look, it was all so sweetly and properly pretty. It was a lazy land, and so for some miles we drove on in a lazy mood. The scenery appeared to us a trifle monotonous, but we had to confess it was a monotony of beauty.

Presently we espied an old sign-post pointing down a narrow lane with "Wigmore Castle" inscribed on the arm of it. We blessed that sign-post; it woke us up as out of a dream. We desired something more eventful than the placid country we were passing through, beautiful though

it was, and that sign-post gave us promise of it. To historic Wigmore Castle we would go and see the ruined stronghold of the once mighty and warlike Mortimers, "whose ambitions and intrigues made more than one English monarch uneasy on his throne," and who once had held all the country, for far around, in awe of them. There we should tread upon storied ground. So down the lane we promptly turned, and after some climbing and much winding about, we arrived at Wigmore, once a town of importance and fame, to which kings and nobles often came, now the sleepiest of villages far from anywhere, with some ancient and picturesquely quaint old half-timber cottages. By the present look of it, one finds it hard to realise the important part it has played in "our rough island's story."

The village was there with its ancient inn, but no sign of the castle could we see. There was no one about of whom to make inquiries; the place seemed deserted, not even a child in its street; houses around, but no face at their windows. It looked like a village under a spell, a village that I had surely read about in some fairy story when I was young. So we pulled up at the inn to make inquiries there. A dog was fast asleep at the door. I went inside and called for a glass of ale as an excuse to ask the way to, and the whereabouts of, the ruins. I almost fancy the landlord must have been asleep too, for he was some time in coming. "Is the name of this village Rip Van Winkle?" I asked of him. I thought to be humorous, but was not understood. "This be Wigmore; I never heard of a place called Rip Van

Winkle, it's not in these parts," said he. The ruined castle was but a short walk away, he explained, and directed me how to reach it. Then I went out to my wife with a view of exploring the ruins, when we both suddenly realised that we were actually hungry again, and we had exhausted the contents of our luncheon basket on the moors. It was the bracing air of those moors that was responsible for our inordinate appetites. Were I a doctor and had a dyspeptic patient, I would order him off a-motoring amongst the moors. I'll wager that would cure him.

The inn, though primitive, was clean, the portly landlord a pattern of civility, so we ventured to sample the quality of his entertainment. Indeed, there was nothing else to do, but starve. He promised to provide us with a feast of bread and cheese, and some excellent ale (I could testify to the goodness of the last), if we would walk into his parlour. To really hungry beings the simplest food and drink appeals, so we walked into the parlour; history, in the shape of the castle, must wait its turn. The parlour was large and even airy, the landlord himself waited upon us, for no maid did we see; the cloth he spread upon the table was spotless; on this he placed a huge crumbling cheese, a whole crusty loaf of bread, two glasses, and a foaming tankard of ale. Give me health and simple fare, hunger needs no tempting dishes. How we enjoyed our meal, to be sure. How tasty seemed that cheese, how delightful the crisp country-baked bread, how refreshing the cool, sparkling ale—a draught for a

god; I would not willingly have exchanged it just then for a bottle of the best brand of champagne. I have been to many a City feast, yet never has my memory dwelt on one of them with such satisfaction as it dwells on that homely repast of bread and cheese at that primitive little village inn. It is not the food that makes the feast, it is the appetite.

The way to the castle was up a steep little lane that climbed for half a mile or more; but not till nearly the very end of it did the ruins come into view. First we came to the time-worn church right on the top of a hill, one side of which was almost a precipice. Why it was built up there puzzled us. Perhaps only its original builders knew. Possibly the site was revealed to some monk or another in a dream, for according to tradition that was the way many a church came to be erected on an odd site. The doors of the church were locked, and we felt no inclination to trudge back to the village in search of the keys,—our antiquarian zeal did not run to that. So we contented ourselves with a walk round the grass-grown churchyard; and in it we discovered an ancient cross with a curious niche cut in the base of it. The purport of this is not very clear, unless it were to contain the Paschal light which was burnt at Eastertide; but this is pure conjecture on my part. On the north wall of the church we also discovered some old herring-bone masonry, which shows its early date.

Then still mounting, soon the crumbling, ivy-grown ruins of the castle stood before us, perched high up on an isolated hill. The outer walls and

towers of this still exist, though rent and broken, and within stands

> A nodding Norman keep,
> Telling with scattered walls and scars
> A rugged tale of great old wars
> And warriors long asleep.

The castle is a mere shell, still an impressive one from its extent and commanding position crowning the steep hill that rises sheer out of the level land below. Impregnable in the old days before the invention of gunpowder must that great fortress have been. From its walls a wide bird's-eye view may be obtained over a vast stretch of country, bounded by an amphitheatre of hills, a view to gladden the eye. Looking down on this fair prospect, it was the proud boast of the early Mortimers that all they saw was their own; and when one of the lords of Wigmore was asked about his title-deeds, he simply laid his hand upon his sword. The answer was sufficient, no one dared to dispute it. Now their fortress palace is desolate, sheep calmly feed within its walls, their burial places are dishonoured, not even a crumbling monument marks their sepulchres. Upon all this one might moralise, but I refrain.

One of the mighty race, Sir Hugh Mortimer to wit, who had led a turbulent life, when in his old age and he could do no further fighting or longer enjoy that exciting life, repented him of his evil ways and sought the peace of the Church and purchased the heaven it had to sell by giving a goodly slice of his lands to the monks, and building an abbey thereon for them at his cost, in which abbey he was buried

in great state before the high altar, doubtless dreaming "it would have canopied his bones till Doomsday—but all things have their end." The abbey is no more, only some moss-covered and grass-grown stones mark its site.

Sir Hugh's son, Roger, who succeeded him, bore the monks no goodwill; he even boldly called them boors who had cheated him of part of his rightful heritage. He did not approve of his father's lordly benefactions to them, for he said his father had bought the peace of his soul at his expense, and he his eldest son, to boot, scarcely a dutiful remark to make. No longer could a Mortimer glance down from his castle towers and see nothing but his own, and that was the sting of it. For Roger had inherited the pride of his race. He too was a Mortimer, and he looked upon the monks as a lazy lot, living on the fat of the land without fighting for what they possessed.

Leaving Wigmore Castle to its ruined loneliness, for the silly sheep served but to emphasise its loneliness, we once more proceeded on our way; and a very pleasant way it proved to be, through a green and pastoral land over which a great peace brooded, a peace that seemed of other days. But a little farther on we had a graphic reminder that those days were not so very peaceful after all. The wind had sunk to rest, the clouds above were "as still as a painted ship upon a painted ocean"; if there were any birds about, not one was there to sing for us, so quiet it was. There was no landmark to be seen, only a gently undulating country all around of hedgerowed fields vanishing into distant blue; our road might

lead us anywhere, and we let it lead us where it would. It was our pleasure to be led. Our tour was absolutely without plan,—a remark I think I have made before; yet on looking at the map after our tour was over, I scarcely think we could have planned a better one. So we motored on; our road led us southward, and that was all we cared to know; the rest we left to Fate.

Then by the side of four cross roads we espied a wayside monument with a long inscription on the face of it. We pulled up to learn what this might be, for what is the use of an inscribed monument if you do not stop to read its story? Then we learnt that in far-off days, wide over this now slumberous country the din and fury of battle rose, and the green land was covered with slaughtered men, for the glory of the few. It was always so; it still is so. The victorious general wears the crown, his name is handed down to posterity, the rank and file are but forgotten dust. We were upon historic ground, we came upon it unawares. And this is the tale the monument told to us:—

This Pedestal is erected to perpetuate the Memory
Of an obstinate, bloody, and decisive battle fought near
This spot in the Civil Wars between the ambitious Houses
Of York and Lancaster on the 2nd day of February 1460.
Between the forces of Edward Mortimer, Earl of
March (afterwards Edward the Fourth) on the side of
York and those of Henry the Sixth on the side of Lancaster.
The King's troops were commanded by Jasper Earl
Of Pembroke. Edward commanded his own in person and
Was victorious. The slaughter was great on both sides,
Four thousand dead being left on the Field and many
Welsh persons of the first distinction were taken prisoners,

Among whom was Owen Tudor (Great Grandfather to Henry the Eight, and a descendant of the illustrious Cadwallader) who was afterwards beheaded at Hereford.

This was the decisive Battle which fixed Edward the Fourth on the Throne of England, who was proclaimed King in London on the fifth of March following.

Erected in the Year 1799.

A glance at our map showed us this spot marked as "Mortimer's Cross," and it was but some three miles from Mortimer's impregnable fortress at Wigmore we had recently left, so that the Earl of March fought with the advantage, if defeated, of having his strong castle at his rear to retreat to. I like my history served up thus upon the spot where the events occurred; it makes it more reliable and more impressive. The somewhat dull country became interesting at once, for the glamour of history was over it and fraught it with meaning. It was no longer uneventful. It would surely be an ideal way of educating the modern schoolboy in the history of his own land to take him to the actual sites of the ancient and important battles fought of old therein. He would no longer think English history dull, and he would vastly enjoy to learn it so. The sight of a spot where great events have happened gives a reality to those events more than pages of reading can ever do.

We drove on through another stretch of quiet country and over indirect roads that appeared to lead to nowhere in particular, and those are the

roads that mostly repay exploring. Just as we were wondering if we should come to any other interesting spot that day, a turn of the road revealed to us a charmingly quaint and picturesque little village, one quite out of the ordinary run of villages, for it had a striking individuality of its own, and this we learnt was Eardisland. You cannot always combine the picturesque with the quaint, but when you can, the result is delightful.

Through the village runs the crystal Arrow, fresh from frolicking amongst the Radnor hills, but here it is a sedate little river quietly gliding along. At one end of the village the river broadens out into a tree-surrounded lakelet, a little beyond is a grey two-arched bridge, and peeping up beyond this again is a large and ancient square-built pigeon-cote with a four-gabled roof, and the top of this is crowned with a broken turret, capped in turn by a tall weather-vane,—quite a lordly pigeon-cote. An effective *coup d'œil*. The village was full of individuality, not in the least like any other one I have seen. What a cathedral is to a city, that pigeon-cote is to Eardisland, it dominates it. But what delighted us most was the perfect picture of an old-world home that was presented to our gaze; an old home that stood just across the road opposite to the lakelet, a home of the sort that one sometimes dreams about or reads of in poetry, but that one hardly expects to find out of a picture. Yet there it stood before us, a happy reality, no vain creation of painter or imagining of poet. Not readily shall I forget the thrill of pleasure that unexpected vision of that ballad in

OLD HOUSE AT EARDISLAND.

building gave me. A home, I guessed, of the fifteenth century, and still having a look of being loved and cared for. There is to many a subtle charm about an ancient house that has been hallowed by the presence of generations gone; a charm that is impossible to set down in mere words, for it is too subtle to be defined. If you question too closely the cause of the charm, the charm may even vanish, yet the question remain unanswered.

The old house was retired from the road by a little garden, bright and sweetly scented with old-fashioned flowers, such as our forefathers loved; the stone wall that bounded it was so friendly and low that even a child might look over it and enjoy the garden as well as its owner can. For this old home did not selfishly shut out its beauties from the passer-by behind high fences, as many old houses do; rather, like some fair maid, it seemed pleased to be admired. For what is the use of beauty unless to be admired? The roof of this old house was of split stones that had become a lovely pearly grey with age; its walls were of half timber and decked with flowering creepers; its windows of leaden lattice panes that gleamed in the sunshine, each diamond pane apparently reflecting the light at a different angle with a jewel-like sparkle. And in front of this ideal home of the picturesque past stood two great yew trees, manifestly of ancient growth, yet still flourishing, and these yews were clipped into the bold form of two big peacocks, at least we judged them to be intended for those

birds, apparently sitting on their nests. At any rate, they were meant to represent some big birds.

It is false taste and an absurd thing to clip a tree, says the critic, and Pope was sarcastic about the savageness of it. This taming of Nature seemed a horrible idea to him; but I like my garden tamed and my country wild. "It is so artificial," says the clever critic,—all critics pose as being clever, for what is the use of being a critic if you do not know more than an author? But, again, is not a house an artificial thing? and so does not its immediate surroundings call for being, to some extent, artificial too, something to stand between it and the fields. The landscape gardenist decries the formal garden, but what is his landscape garden but a poor imitation of Nature; give me the real article or nothing at all. A garden is Nature tamed; you cannot get away from the fact, to keep an ordered garden of any kind is a constant struggle against Nature. A garden is as much man's handiwork as the house in which he lives. In his garden he is surely entitled to express his individuality; he must either be the master or the slave of Nature,—even a field is artificial. So the formal garden and the landscape garden differ only in degree, after all. And the formal garden, with its clipped trees, its bowling greens, its lily-padded ponds, its terraced walks, its sun-dials, its arbours, its fountains, and its statuary, what a pleasant and restful thing it is! And are any flowers so sweet of scent and so full of colour as the old-fashioned ones? I trow not.

Leaving Eardisland the country became some-

what hilly, a country wherein the trees were huddled into sheltered hollows, and here and there, half-drowned in foliage, we caught a sight of the grey gables, roofs, and chimneys of some ancient home, with the blue film of its smoke curling lazily upwards to the bluer sky. Nearly every sign-post pointed the way to Hereford and the outer world familiar to all. We preferred the unknown to the known, yet at Hereford we knew from past experience we should find at the "Green Dragon" delightful harbourage for the night. The roads to Hereford were many, the way there was easy to find; but Hereford is a city, and we should have preferred a country inn, still, as Plautus wisely says, *Certa amittimus dum incerta petimus.* And there is much wisdom in his ancient philosophy, for truths never die. To Hereford and to the "Green Dragon" there we would go. The "Green Dragon" is an uncommon sign. I take it, it is intended for the dragon that St. George killed. During all my many years of wandering in England I do not think that I have slept more than six times beneath that sign; and I wish there were more "Green Dragons" in the land, if they all were as good as those I sampled.

We left Hereford early next day, for the morning was too gloriously fine to stay abed or to linger indoors after the needful breakfast. As we had already seen all that Hereford has to show the traveller, which is much and interesting, we took leave of the city without delay, and we drove straight on from our hotel without asking the way, just taking the chance of the road. Indeed, as we did

not know where we were going, the asking of our way would have presented a difficulty. All we could have asked would be, "Which is the nearest way into the country?" We did once ask this question when lost in the heart of busy Bristol, only too anxious to get out of it—to anywhere; but I think the man we accosted thought us two lunatics at large in a car, for he naturally responded with a wondering look, "What part of the country is it you want?" People cannot understand any one driving about the country and having no destination to give. To them it seems an idiotic thing to do, and possibly in their place and from their point of view I should think the same thing too.

We had not proceeded far when we discovered by a sign-post that we were on the road to Ross and "Gloster." That road did very well, for it was a pleasant one, a trifle hilly in places, but all the better for that, as a hilly road usually means fine views and varied prospects. Such a road may generally be trusted as to scenery. I have now no special recollection of the country on to Ross, merely a vague impression of its pleasantness, which made the miles seem short. On Ross bridge we halted to photograph the quaint old pillared and four-faced sun-dial that stands in one of the recesses provided for foot-passengers; a curious position for a sun-dial, so it the more attracts attention. No sun-dial seems complete without a motto that generally points a moral. In this respect the one at Ross does not fail, and this is how it greets the traveller who stops to read it—

SUN-DIAL ON ROSS BRIDGE.

Redeem thy precious time,
Which pass so swift away,
Prepare thou for eternity,
And do not make delay.

Sun-dial mottoes are mostly serious, they sermonise overmuch, they emphasise the shadow, oblivious of the sunshine; and how small is the sunshine compared with the shadow on a dial, or in the world. I have frequently met with comedy, and even clever wit, expressed in an inscription on a tombstone, but never on a dial, where it might cheer the lonely wanderer on his way. Instead of this, he almost invariably has some trite moral forced upon him. Life is serious, or philosophers would not have said so of it; but there are times when surely one may be allowed for a brief space to forget that man is mortal. It is not his fault that he is, why din it into him? Speaking for myself, I am quite capable of doing my own moralising. I tried to buy an old sun-dial for my garden, but could not discover one without a melancholy motto plainly engraved on it. Our ancestors appeared to like to have their morals served thus. Yet, strangely enough, they could, and did, jest on their tombstones.

We had been to Ross more than once before; moreover, there we were on tourist-haunted ground, so on this occasion we did not stop to renew our acquaintance with the familiar, but sped on to Gloucester and the unknown beyond, wherever that beyond might be. Our road was pleasant enough, but not exciting, and we observed nothing note-

worthy till nearing Gloucester, when over the woods to our right we espied a church with a curious gabled spire strongly resembling the Saxon tower of Sompting church in Sussex, which latter is, I believe, considered by learned archaeologists to be unique in England. Could we possibly have discovered another ancient tower of this rare Saxon type? we asked ourselves. From a short way off the tower looked old and grey. A sign-post at the corner of the next lane pointed the way to it, and even gave its precise distance; for on the one arm of this we read "Churcham Church 3 furlongs." There is nothing like being exact in unimportant details. Merely the church was named and not the little village gathered round it. As though the remote fane were all in all, the humble abodes of men of no consideration.

Churcham church was a disappointment as far as its tower was concerned, for it proved not to be ancient, though it had been built long enough to have some of the bloom of age upon it, so that when seen from a distance it might deceive the very elect; but it was manifestly the work of the latter end of the last century, an uninspired copy. Still it was worth the three furlongs' drive out of our course, if only to witness the fine view from the churchyard extending over a vast extent of woodlands to a long undulating range of low hills beyond, so space-expressing was the prospect, so full of summer silence and sunlit air, for the very air seemed to hold the sunlight in suspense.

We searched the churchyard in vain for any

quaint epitaph, for it appeared a likely place to find one. The church door was locked, so we did not get a glance inside; but over the south porch we noticed an ancient, square sun-dial, and in the churchyard stood an oak post with an iron lanthorn-holder on the top to light the way on winter nights to worshippers, a convenience I have not observed in similar circumstances before. Outside the churchyard was a large pond with a little island in it; this, with the tower of the church reflected in the water, made a pretty picture. The village of Churcham consists of a farm-house or two and the rectory. You could hardly find a more sleepy spot in all the land, though it is no "sleepy hollow," for it stands high up in the world. We wondered if ever a motor car had found its way there before. It lies basked in peace off the main road on the road to nowhere. Our coming there brought the well-known lines of Shakespeare to mind, and is it not the privilege of all Englishmen to quote "the immortal bard"?

Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i' the sun,
Come hither, come hither, come hither.

CHAPTER XVII

A voyage of discovery—The sky and the weather—The winding Severn—Iron Acton manor-house and its story—An anecdote of Sir Walter Raleigh—A fine preaching-cross—An interesting church—A pretty village and quaint market-cross—Cherhill White Horse—Inn gossips—A new rendering of an old proverb.

We drove through Gloucester without a stop, for the same reason that we did not tarry at either Hereford or Ross. We were in search of the unexplored, not the well-known. To us the famous spots of England lack the refreshing sense of freshness; we were on a voyage of discovery in a land where all things have been discovered, yet had not been discovered by us. Even when Columbus found America it was known to the Indians there. So we drove through Gloucester and its uninteresting suburbs (an ancient town without modern suburbs is my delight, but how few of these exist); however in due course we escaped from the house-lined streets into the fair country again, where green fields take the place of buildings, and footpaths those of pavements, and where the sun seems glad to shine. All large towns are more or less stuffy in the summer time, and their skies are sadly greyed with overhanging smoke. How little one observes the sky in the town; in the country it commands attention, and

there you may, with a little study, soon learn to foretell the weather by the look of the clouds, just as the countryman does, whose predictions about it I have generally found more to be trusted than the "Forecasts" in the daily papers.

Free of Gloucester, we found ourselves on a wide road leading south, and we had the silvery Severn for a time flowing by our side. Here the river gradually broadening all the way down to the sea is crossed by no bridge, except a railway one that was useless to us, so we had perforce to drive on or take a turning to the left, but for some miles no inviting turning presented itself, and as our road was a pleasant one, albeit a trifle dusty, we stuck to it for several miles. The country was agreeable enough, and we noted, and photographed, one or two pretty thatched cottages on the way; but I think it would have puzzled even a guide-book compiler to say anything about it. For the twenty miles or more I only remember passing through one village, and that was Whitminster, where we noticed a decayed old coaching inn and a few cottages. Shortly after which the scenery began to pluck up spirit, and that in no half-hearted fashion, for from the top of a hill a glorious panorama was wholly unexpectedly presented to our vision. There below us lay the gleaming Severn, now grown lake-like in its width—

> Lying 'twixt hills of green, and bound afar
> By billowing mountains rolling in the blue.

The mountains being those of Wales. This bit of scenic revelation was a delightful surprise, a thrilling

surprise, in truth the country we had passed through had given no hint of such a thing. The view reminded me distinctly of the one looking down fair Windermere; it seemed almost as though by some magic we had been transported there, and yet we were in a southern land where no lakes are. Misty mountains, wooded hills, and wide winding river made a scene of such beauty as will for ever remain in my memory, and greater was the joy thereof because of its unexpectedness, for pleasant things that come unsought please all the more.

You travel far and wide and view many lovely landscapes, landscapes that please you at the moment, though when home again you find that only a few of them linger plainly in the memory, the others fade away, and it is in vain that you endeavour to recall their precise outlines or details, for these have become lost and blurred, leaving only a vague general impression. I think the real test of the pleasure that a landscape gives is the carrying away of a definite impression of it, so that if an artist you could, should the fancy take you, reproduce on paper or on canvas its essential features broadly, but fairly correctly, sufficiently so that any one familiar with the scene would probably easily recognise it. At any rate this special prospect of the wide Severn lying lake-like amongst the wooded hills came back to my mind's eye so vividly some weeks afterwards, that to make a rough water-colour drawing and likeness of it presented no difficulty. But the charm of a scene depends not on the eye, which is but a living lens, but on the mind behind that eye; and

no words or work of pencil or of brush can convey to a mind not attuned to it the pleasure and the meaning of a beautiful scene. To me, not the least delight of travel is the ever-growing picture-gallery of beauty spots that I gather and treasure in my mind—

> For oft, when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude.

Soon afterwards we discovered from a sign-post that, though some miles away, we were approaching Bristol; and having no desire to go there or to any large town, we took advantage of the next turning to get off our road. Small unprogressive country towns are on a different footing; they are but overgrown villages, where you are likely to meet with odd and interesting characters, who, moreover, are not usually averse to gossiping, and where you may chance to find an old coaching hostelry, that in spite of its faded glories is far to be preferred to the prosperous town hotel, and is less expensive.

The lane which we turned up was not an attractive one, at least not at the start, but it had the virtue of not leading to Bristol, and by taking it we kept to the country. The lane was narrow, and presently and suddenly it dropped down a very steep hill, where it grew so narrow that our car shaved the tangled hedges on either side of it; what we should have done had we met any other traffic there I know not, possibly we should have had to open a gate and drive into a field. Fortunately we met nothing;

still I presume that there is a possibility of two vehicles meeting on it, but that is no affair of mine. We got to the bottom unimpeded and in safety, and that is all that concerns me. Not even in Devonshire, whose lanes are a terror, have I come upon a narrower or I think a steeper one. At the foot of the descent we discovered a lonely farm-house built long ago, by the solid look of it; for they have not built so strong and sturdily for generations past. A modern builder would consider it a scandalous waste of material to build like that. Here a child ran into the garden at the side of the house and cried out to some one within, "Nana, there's a carriage going along without a horse," and this in apparent astonishment, so that we wondered if she had ever seen a motor car before; perhaps that narrow lane and hill prevent their coming there. In remote country spots I have actually met old people who have declared to me that they have never travelled in a railway train; and there may be some people in the land who have never seen a motor car; perhaps the day will come when we shall be surprised to find any one who has not seen an aeroplane in flight. The world moves apace; some people even think it moves too fast, but that has been the complaint of ages. I was only the other day reading in an old paper a lament upon the "terrific speed" at which the mail coaches were driven on the road. I remember my grandfather, who posted about the country a good deal in the pre-railway period, telling me that the mail coaches were the terror of the road. Had he only lived to meet a motor car at full speed

approaching him on the highway, I wonder what he would have said about it! Nothing exactly complimentary, I fear.

Up and down hill we went over lanes that were wider, but none too wide; then we struck upon a decent road, which we followed just for the pleasure of being on a good road, and after awhile we found ourselves in a remote little village. As we entered this we caught sight of a grey old gabled home with a decayed arched gateway in front of it. A home of ancient times and still a home of to-day; yet it looked so wan and old (some of its walls were supported by buttresses to prevent them giving way) that we felt quite sorry for it, as far as one can be sorry for an inanimate thing. There we stopped to inspect and photograph the old place, also with a view of asking the name of it. For some time we saw no one, and we took our photographs undisturbed. Presently, however, an intelligent little lad appeared upon the scene, and in reply to our query he said, "This be Iron Acton village, and that be the manor-house." We thanked him for his information, and gave him a penny, for he was a civil lad, and clean. He appeared very pleased at the trifling gift, for even a penny is not often so easily earned in the country. "Now, how will you spend it?" we asked. He responded, he would have to think the matter over; there is a pleasure, when you have money, in considering how you will spend it. "Sweets," we suggested. "No, I think I'll buy a whistle," said he, "a whistle lasts, but sweets don't." So spoke the youthful philosopher.

Then left alone again, we began a quiet inspection of the old manor-house, which, though it has the look of former importance, stands only a little way back from the road, and does not hold itself proudly aloof from it. The arched gateway, which we afterwards learnt was set up in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, long after the house had been erected, is of graceful design and well-proportioned. In the spandrels of the arch are some coats-of-arms engraved in stone, and though much weathered the details can still be made out, and might possibly afford a clue to its builder, at least to those learned in heraldic lore. The windows of the house are stone-mullioned ones of the Tudor period, but there is a single Gothic window, possibly a relic of earlier times, for the house has manifestly been in parts rebuilt and much altered by successive owners, which adds to its interest and picturesqueness. It is possible, also, that the Gothic window is the window of a chapel, but as we did not see the interior of the place this is but guessing.

The manor-house, grey with years, with its massive walls and big chimney-stacks overgrown with ivy, strongly appealed to us; it suggested romance. "The house has a history," I said to myself. It looked it, for there is an intangible something about certain old houses that says of each, "as plain as whisper in the ear, the place is haunted" with memories. I love old houses with perhaps an unreasonable love; possibly I hold them dear because the happiest days of my life were spent in them, for pleasant associations have much

to do with our appreciation of things. The "caw" of rooks is really a harsh, unpleasing sound, yet one associates it with the country and big trees, and for this cause most people delight in it. Until of late years, we were told, an old Armada treasure-chest was preserved in the old house.

On my return home I set to work to hunt up the history of the manor, if by chance I might discover it. Fate was unexpectedly kind to me, for I found some one who knew much of its past, and who kindly gave me a store of information about it. And I gleaned that the house, once moated, originally belonged to the Acton family, who were the first to build a house, or castle, there; then after long years it came into the possession of the Poyntzes—a family descended from a cousin of William the Conqueror—by the marriage of John Poyntz, afterwards Sir John Poyntz, to Matilda, cousin and heiress of Sir John Acton, who died in 1344. After which the Poyntzes held the manor uninterruptedly till 1684, over three eventful centuries. The Poyntzes were an important and a powerful family in their day, and favourites at several courts. One Sir Robert Poyntz was in attendance on the king at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Henry VII. was entertained by this Sir Robert Poyntz at his manor-house of Iron Acton, and Queen Elizabeth was also entertained there in 1575 by another and later distinguished descendant of the family, Sir Nicholas Poyntz, to wit.

Sir Walter Raleigh was related to the Poyntzes (I write Raleigh, as it is the custom to write that

unfortunate knight's name so, though he spelt it Ralegh, and I think a man ought to know how to spell his own name); however, this is a matter apart, and does not disturb the little bit of history I am about to relate. It appears that Sir Walter Raleigh, on one of his visits to Iron Acton manor-house, whilst strolling in the garden, lighted his pipe, and the story goes that the ladies of the party, suddenly meeting him and seeing the smoke coming out of his mouth, thought he was on fire or bewitched, and forthwith fled away in terror; but that was three hundred years ago. Many greater marvels have happened since then.

So much of the history of this old house I gathered, and a good deal of picturesque, if uncertain, tradition besides; but I will confine myself to its recorded history, for this is romantic and interesting enough, though its unwritten legends are more romantic still. Acton alone was the original title of the place, but Iron, it seems, got tacked on to it because iron ore was once mined there in considerable quantities, just as it was in Sussex, where some of the streams still run red with the metal in the soil.

Leaving this storied house to its present uneventful existence, we drove into the village, and on reaching the church our attention was arrested by the sight of a beautiful and well-preserved preaching-cross standing in the graveyard and close to the road, the unexpected sight of which gave us a delightful surprise. Perhaps an out-of-door canopied stone pulpit would best express it, for that is what

DECAYED PREACHING-CROSS IN IRON ACTON CHURCHYARD.

it really is. I have only seen such a thing once before, and that is in the ruins of the Black Friars' monastery at Hereford. My photograph of this quaint and most interesting cross, here reproduced, will give a better idea of what this curious structure is like than pages of description could possibly do. From this it will be seen that it has lost its cross on the top, and that much of its carved adornments are gone; still, as a whole it retains its ancient form, and the open passage to the left may be noticed by which the priest gained access to the interior, from whence he preached to the congregation gathered around in the churchyard, and probably collected in the road beyond. It is by no means a bad idea to preach to the people in the open air; the doing so to-day might well attract the non-churchgoer and the careless passer-by.

Iron Acton church has a fine tower with some boldly-carved and quaint gargoyles, and curiously placed on the north parapet of it is the sculptured stone figure of a knight in armour, standing there solitary and out in the cold, facing all the bitter winter blasts, a sport for every storm that blows. Very possibly the figure was removed from the interior of the building at some former "restoration" and set up there for some incomprehensible reason, or no reason at all, but just for a whim. The idea that this is the explanation of the strange position of the figure occurred to me on discovering within the church a fine canopied altar-tomb with the usual place for an effigy vacant. In past times even stranger things were done by so-called restorers;

a better term for them would surely be destroyers. Long ago I ceased to be astonished at their doings, and at the age that allowed them such licence.

Within the church of Iron Acton we found, as we expected to find, several monuments to the Poyntz family; and stately ones, as befitted a family of such distinction. They were, too, in a fair state of preservation, though, as before mentioned, one altar-tomb was without its effigy where doubtless one had been. These monuments, we learnt by an inscription, were restored in 1879 by three descendants of the family, so that though the place knows them no more, their name has not perished out of the land.

And besides the adorned altar-tombs we discovered two incised stone slabs on the chancel floor, one with the representation of a knight in full armour, and the other with the representation of a lady in quaint costume. The first slab bore the following inscription:—"Here lyeth Robert Poyntz, Lord of Acton, who this stepye here maked, Who deyed the fyftene daye of Junne in the yeer of owre Lord 1439. Of whos Soule God have mercy. Amen." The other: "Here lyeth Anne, the first wyfe of Robert Poyntz, of whos Soule God have mercy. Amen." What the "stepye" was this Robert Poyntz made I cannot say; the term puzzles me, nor can I find any enlightenment as to its meaning in any book of reference I have consulted. I venture to guess, however, that it refers to the preaching-cross, as this structure seems to be of about that period. What an advantage to the antiquary it is that the people in old times built in the

style of the period in which they lived, and did not depart from it. To-day we build in many styles, no style at all, and of all periods, so that in the centuries to come it will be difficult for our descendants to make sure of the date of most modern buildings, providing they last so long. As it is, I feel our most successful buildings are not original, but more or less copies of old ones; and the better the copy the more it is likely to bewilder future antiquaries.

Iron Acton church has manifestly suffered by restorations, but its last restoration, I should judge, was done in the proper spirit, unhappily a very rare spirit, so that what was left of its ancient features have been carefully preserved rather than further destroyed. The oak altar rails, so seldom to be found now, have not been improved away in favour of bright Birmingham brass fittings, that one generally looks for in such positions, and that never can be in harmony with an ancient building. One cannot "put new wine into old bottles," architecturally speaking, without hurt. The finely carved Jacobean pulpit, with its ornate sounding-board, still stands as of old, unharmed. Possibly a blessed want of coin caused it to be left unmolested, for there are rare occasions when a want of it is a blessing. Even the quaint lettered inscription on the central panel at the back of the pulpit is there, and this runs:

Robert Hopper Parson
Thomas Leg and
Mighill Tvck
CHVRCH WARDENS
ANNO 1624.

But perhaps what interested us most was an ancient helmet still showing traces of colouring, that hung on an iron bracket from the east chantry wall, a clenched hand on the top forming the crest. At the end of the bracket is a cross-bar, and on one side of this is suspended a bit of torn leather, probably the remains of a surcoat; on the other side there hangs a rusted spur, graphic reminders of the brave days gone by. We also noticed in one of the windows some rare and beautiful old stained glass, of that rich yet mellow colour that we seem unable, with all our cleverness, to produce to-day. There were also other ancient things of minor interest in the church; but I think I have mentioned enough to show what a delightful old church it is, and how much there is therein to charm the lover of the past. As Bacon says, "It is a reverend thing to see an ancient building, not in decay." And I would add, repaired, when needful, but not restored.

Driving on, we presently reached another pleasant little village; we did not stop to inquire its name, but from my map I think it must be Yate; but Yate or otherwise, there we noticed a fine church tower with a parapet so delicately carved in open work that I can only liken it to stone lace. We were almost tempted to stop and examine this church, for so fine a tower suggested a fine interior, but one church is enough to see on a fine summer day. So we passed on. The cheerful sunshine, the fresh air, and the open country more than sufficed us. At a steep rise that followed we saw this notice by the roadside—

Please let your horse
Have his head up
the hill.
Gradient 1 in 12.

How thoughtful some people are and precise about detail. It is almost unique to find the gradient of a road displayed thus, though I wonder if it means much to the countryman; a hill to him is a hill, figures do not make it less or more of a hill; he judges its steepness by his eyes, and a good way too. I take it as a sign of grace that we drove so slowly as to be able to read this notice.

Then shortly we reached the sleepy little town of Chipping Sodbury. We recognised it as an old friend, though the coming upon it was unexpected, for we had passed through the place on a former tour, but were glad to renew our acquaintance with its dreamy old houses. It is a town with a genuine old-world flavour, and its wide and sunny street gives the traveller a pleasant sense of roominess and cheerfulness. Wide-streeted towns are generally pleasant ones. Soon afterwards we began a long climb, which brought us on to high ground, and passing a little lonely inn we struck upon a bleak upland of stone walls and wide views, a country with a wild and forlorn look. The road was deserted, and for a time the fascination of speed took hold of us. An open road, a good car, and a wide throttle, and the distance seems to rush at you; then you thirst for a continent to travel over. That burst of speed, the rush through the bracing air, was a fine stimulant, the nearest approach to actual fly-

ing I can imagine; and it added to our enjoyment that we endangered or inconvenienced no one—not even a rabbit.

There was an absence of sign-posts on our road, possibly because but few travellers use it. However, that did not trouble us, we just drove on; as long as we were going we cared little where we went. Then we dropped down into a sheltered and wooded country where the air was less keen, and green hedges took the place of the bleak stone walls. There was a past-time look about the country, the scattered houses and farmsteads all had an ancient and a mellow appearance, and here and there peeping out of a rambling colony of farm buildings we espied a pigeon-cote, and here and there we caught a vision of an old-fashioned garden with clipped yew trees and shady lawns. It was a land of ancient homes that told of long abiding. It was all so restful; and in an age of unrest how refreshing a thing it is to come into a quiet land where broods the peace of olden times. A great sense of calm came over us, so we drove slowly on in a dreamy way through that dreamy country. Great patches of golden sunshine and grey cloud shadows chased each other endlessly over our road, but we noticed no other movement in the country-side, so sleepy did all things seem.

After a time a sign-post materialised, then another pointing down a steep and narrow lane that had "Castle Combe" inscribed upon it. The name was familiar to us, though for the moment we could not reason why; we had never been in that part of

THE PRETTY VILLAGE OF CASTLE COMBE.

the country before; then suddenly we remembered that long ago a friend, who had been there on an archaeological excursion, had told us that Castle Combe was the sweetest village he had ever seen in all his English wanderings. We thereupon made a mental note of the name, and the chance glance at the sign-post brought it back to our memory and the words spoken in praise thereof. So, without further thought, we turned down the lane to see the spot and judge of it for ourselves. We were prepared to be disappointed, for when you have heard much in praise of a place, the mind is apt to create an ideal for itself that the reality often rudely dispels. But in this case no disappointment awaited us, rather a delightful surprise; that is one of the advantages of never expecting too much. In the same way I always allow a discount off the artist's picture of a place, for I know it is an artist's business to romance a little. A successful portrait painter once confided to me that one secret of his success, besides his skill with the brush, was that he always made it a point to flatter his sitters "just a little," and he seldom had complaints.

Half a mile down a steep tree-overhung descent brought us to Castle Combe, and there before us lay the charming little village nestled in a deep wooded hollow. "A cup-full of beauty." A charming village in truth it is, one that fully justifies that often misappropriated adjective. Pleasant to look upon with its old, stone-built, stone-roofed, mullioned windowed, and gabled cottages, its fifteenth-century, well-preserved market-cross with a shelter below,

and its little limpid stream that flows through it and under a low three-arched bridge; and above the roofs of the houses rises the grey tower of its ancient church, with just one tall and fretted pinnacle at the corner of it. We saw the village basking in the warm afternoon sunshine, and so perhaps at its best; but beautiful at all times it must be, and the liquid sound of running water adds to its cheerfulness, for the ear is pleased as well as the eye. Clean and tidy too the village was, yet not too prim like the model village often is at the cost of naturalness.

The beautiful cross that stands in the centre of the village where three roads meet is the treasure of the place. This has a high-pitched roof to its shelter below, and forms a delightfully picturesque central and interesting feature for the eye to rest upon. From my photograph of this, here reproduced, it will be seen that the cross on the top has apparently been at some time supplanted by a stone carved pinnacle, but this pinnacle is now old and grey, and suits the structure well. The base of the shaft of the cross is richly adorned with carved shields and other devices, a suggestion of which may be glimpsed in the same photograph.

At Castle Combe we stayed a long while by our watch, though it seemed short, for to us there was a magnetic attraction about the place. Such a pretty village one does not meet with every day, nor in a year of days; indeed, it tempted us to expose a full dozen photographic films, though our supply was sadly diminishing, and we had much yet

THE MARKET-CROSS, CASTLE COMBE.

to see and to photograph before we got back home again. Many tourists, according to my experience, travel far to behold some famous beauty spot, and on reaching it they just take a hurried glance around and pass along. This seems a strange thing to do, yet often have I seen it done. It suggests to me that this numerous but not-to-be-envied class of tourists merely go to see a place, in order to be able to say they have seen it. Sheridan's son, it is recorded, informed his father that he had descended a coal mine in order that he might be able to say he had done so. To which Sheridan, with the easy-going morality of his day, exclaimed, "If that's all, you might easily have said you had been down a coal mine without the trouble of actually making the descent." When I was at Capel Curig a party in a motor came along; I think they had hired the car for the day; they stopped there for perhaps three minutes to admire the view, a good half of which was spent in reading a description of it from a guide-book, then one of the party queried, "Where are we going next?" and off they went. That is one way of "doing" scenery, a mere gathering of impressions, profitless and confusing.

Climbing out of Castle Combe, we struck upon a pleasant stretch of elevated country, and ahead of us, cut out of the green side of a sloping hill we saw the figure of a great white horse. I wonder how many white horses there are in England thus cut on the hill-sides? We have come upon several during our tours. However, this white horse varied from the rest insomuch as it was fairly correctly and

spiritedly outlined, as artistic indeed as such a thing can be. We afterwards learnt from the landlord of our hotel at Chippenham that this was known as the Cherhill White Horse, that it was cut by the head master of Calne School fifty years ago, that it was the best drawn horse in England of the kind, and that it marked the highest point of land between Exeter and London.

A long and gradual descent brought us to Chippenham, where we found a comfortable, old-fashioned coaching inn, and as the sun was setting we elected to stay the night there ; for having sampled our inn, we felt we "might go farther and fare worse," which is a stupid thing to do. During the course of the evening I strolled into the bar to listen to the gossip of the townsfolk forgathered there, on the chance of finding entertainment, for there was nothing else to do. In such a spot and at such a time, when men relax, the serious business of the day being over, and the talk waxes loud and free as the glasses pass around, a good listener may, by chance, pick up odd bits of information, unfamiliar sayings, quaint dictums, or failing these, at least he will learn how the local world wags, and he can always study character. At one country inn where I had stopped for a few days some years ago it came to my knowledge that a certain *Punch* artist had also stopped before me, and I was told that he used to make a point of spending his evenings in the bar thereof studying and sketching the various characters as they came upon the scene, and often he picked up a joke or two besides. The face of

one man I met there had a familiar look, though why I could not tell; it was he who afterwards confided to me the story of the *Punch* artist, and how he had often "drawed" him, then I realised why his face was so familiar.

Unfortunately the evening I spent in the bar of "mine inn" at Chippenham was a somewhat unprofitable one, but fortune is an uncertain dame. However, there I spent an hour or more in a clouded atmosphere of tobacco smoke pungent enough to sicken the hardiest microbe. I heard little that was worth the hearing; but one remark took my fancy. It was, I gathered, about a man who married his deceased wife's sister. "He were a wise man," said the speaker, "for he has only one mother-in-law." The saying may not be original, but it was fresh to me. Then another man began talking about a farmer, so at least I understood, who it appeared had succeeded and prospered exceedingly on land whereon all previous tenants had failed. "However does he do it?" queried another. "I'll tell yer, Bill," came response, "it's simple enough, he just worked when others lazed, and saved when others spent. You never saw him with a pipe in his mouth, or a glass in his hand." Now Bill had a pipe in his mouth and a glass, that had been twice filled, in his hand. Then as the talking dulled down and I was about leaving there entered another man whom all gathered there appeared to know and welcome. The respectful way he was greeted and listened to when he spoke suggested that he was a local inhabitant of some importance

relative to the rest. It appeared he had just returned from a long sea voyage, and he forthwith began a long-winded account thereof. Of him I expected much, some romance of the sea, so I resumed my seat awaiting a marvellous story with a feeling of certainty; but, alas! unlike "the ancient mariner," he had no strange tale to tell. No sea-serpents, no Flying Dutchmen, no terrible storms, no wrecks, no adventures, no novel sights, no thrilling experiences enlivened his record; he was a truthful man, but he had no poetry in his soul. He reminded me of the traveller of whom Humboldt remarked, "He has journeyed farther and seen less than any one I know." Then apropos of something, a fresh speaker made use of the old, well-known proverb, "Till May's out, don't leave off a clout." "You've got it wrong," exclaimed another, "May's not always cold. I mind my father telling me that the real saying is, 'Till the may is out, don't cast a clout,' meaning the shrub, not the month."

CHAPTER XVIII

Maud Heath's causeway—Lacock and its old houses—A dog spit—Lacock Abbey—Early photographs—Farleigh-Hungerford Castle—A curious chapel—A gruesome sight—A puzzling inscription—Beckington Castle—"A haunted house restorer"—A famous bishop builder.

NEXT morning we took a stroll round the town and sought out a photographer's shop in case we might discover there any views of interesting places in the neighbourhood. We discovered several. Amongst the photographs was one of Maud Heath's monument set on a hill, but who Maud Heath was, or why she had such a tall monument erected to her, I had no idea; and yet my wife thought I ought to know, "for she must be a famous personage to have such a fine monument," said she. "Who was Maud Heath?" I asked of the man who sold the photographs. "Oh!" responded he, "she was a market woman who lived a longish while ago, for she died in 1474, and she left her life's savings to make a stone causeway of some three or four miles in length over a low-lying and often flooded tract of land between Kellaways and here, so that the poor country folk might walk to the town dryshod." So she earned her monument. As you travel about in England you are constantly

coming upon some person whose name was unknown to you before, but who would perpetuate his or her name and fame by presenting a new pulpit to the church, or at least a new pump to the village. At one little town we passed through we learnt by a boldly-painted notice over a disused pump in the market-place that a certain citizen had provided this pump, and left a hundred pounds besides, the interest upon which was to be devoted to keeping the said pump in order and to supplying a lamp above it with oil, and a man to light the same every night from Michaelmas to Lady Day for ever. A hundred pounds to perpetuate your name, locally at least, "for ever"! I had no idea the thing could be done so cheaply or so lastingly. Only, by the irony of fate, the pump is no longer used; still the board recording the gift was there. But Maud Heath's deed appears to have been done out of pure philanthropy, so she deserves her monument and her name to be preserved, though doubtless she had no thought or desire for such fame.

Other photographs we saw were of Lacock Abbey and ancient village, both of which looked interesting, especially the quaint buildings of the village, and we were told that Lacock lay only a few miles off, so we determined that to Lacock we would go that day, first exploring Maud Heath's long-existing causeway, for we learnt that this was still in use. We also came upon a photograph of an ancient church or chapel, whose walls were hung around, almost covered indeed, with armour, spears,

breastplates, swords, helmets,—strange decorations surely for a peaceful place of worship. The curious photograph interested us greatly, and this we found was of the chapel of Farleigh-Hungerford Castle, which castle was but twenty miles or so away; that, too, we would see. Our visit to the photographer's was not without result.

Returning to our inn, we consulted with the ostler how best to find Maud Heath's causeway, then we sought the landlord to wish him good-day, for he had treated us well, besides giving us much interesting local information, and we desired to acknowledge his kindness; we felt that we owed him something more than the mere payment of our bill. We settled our modest reckoning with pleasure, for it was strictly moderate. The be-ribboned maid who waited upon us was attentive, the boots obliging and civil, and what more could the most exacting traveller desire or obtain, even if he were a millionaire? So we left our inn with our blessing, which cost us nothing to bestow, though we did not always see our way to bestow it.

Leaving Chippenham, we soon came to the causeway, a wide and raised stone-flagged path that ran by the side of the road. This we followed for perhaps three miles or more to the lowlands at Kellaways, where the path ended, and where we found a little primitive church, an old grey mill by the river side (for a little river flowed there through the marshy meadows), and a lonely farmstead—a truly peaceful spot. The profound silence that reigned around was broken only by the drowsy

droning of the mill wheel and the quiet wash of the water gliding over the wide weir. There by the marshes, where the land lies low and doubtless is often flooded, the causeway is raised on a series of small arches.

Maud Heath's monument stands on a hill above. From a distant view of this one might imagine that it was erected by a grateful country to the memory of some great and victorious general for his services, so important a look has it. Rising out of the marshes below is a lesser memorial to her in the form of a pillared and four-sided sun-dial having some improving mottoes running round it. Whenever I come upon an ancient sun-dial I always expect to find a lettered sermon, and rarely are my expectations at fault. How our forefathers loved to preach, to be sure; but from all I have read about them, I fancy they found preaching easier by far than the practising of what they so cheaply preached. It was on this journey that I asked a villager what sort of a man his parson was. "He's a saint in the pulpit," he responded; "but out of it he's a rare old sinner like the rest of us, though he's none the worse for that!" I fancy that man liked his parson so; he was not too good for him. But to return to the sun-dial and the improving mottoes written large upon it. There was one for the early morning traveller, one for the midday traveller, and one for the evening traveller—none escaped. As we were morning travellers, ours ran—

> Oh, early passenger, look up, be wise,
> And think how night and day Time onward flies.

MAUD HEATH'S PILLAR, NEAR CHIPPENHAM.

Those who go by this way in the evening are greeted thus:

Haste, traveller, the sun is sinking now;
He shall return again, but never thou.

Which appears to me a rather doleful assertion of the unknown; for how could the man who flings his pious sentiments thus in your face tell that the late traveller would never return that way again? The midday traveller is lectured less seriously, though seriously enough. He is told that "Life steals away—this hour is only lent thee." I once met a merry man, and a very merry man he seemed, so much so that I wondered what his trade could be that kept him so jovial; then I discovered he made his living by engraving tombstone inscriptions! Not an inspiriting way of getting a living, yet I could not possibly have associated that man with anything serious from the manner of him. The point of the relation is whether the composers of these sun-dial mottoes were as serious-minded as their compositions might lead one to suppose.

On the pillar in front of the dial is inscribed the following:—

To the Memory
Of the worthy Maud
Heath of Langly Burrell,
Widow,
Who in the year of Grace
1474
For the good of travellers did
In Charity bestow in Land and
Houses about Eight pounds a year
For ever to be laid out on the

Highway and Causey leading
From Wick Hill to Chippenham Clift.

This Piller was set up by
The Feoffees in
1698.

On the other side of the road to the mill stands an odd little chapel alone in the fields and surrounded by a tiny graveyard. It is an ugly building of carefully squared stones, with windows that, I presume, are supposed to be Gothic; but it has a good ornamental bell-turret, with a vane on the top. The porch of this building is a strange combination of Classic and Gothic, with an uncompromising stone ball on the top that might belong to either style. The door of the chapel was locked, so we peeped through the keyhole; but all we could see was an oak altar,—it might be a table, but it looked like an altar, and on it stood a great gilt cross and two candles. There was no light hanging before the altar, so we took it to be a Church of England place of worship; but where the worshippers came from, unless the miller and farmer, their men-servants and their maids, formed the congregation, we could not imagine. Scant was the harvest gathered in the sad "God's Acre" that surrounded the little fane, and somehow it pleased us to know this. There were no stately mouldering monuments to tell of human vanity; but we did notice one tiny grass-grown grave of an infant, and on this stood a simple jam-pot with some freshly-gathered buttercups and daisies gracefully arranged therein, telling plainly of a poor parent's love. Though the

little grave was not recent, as the green grass grown over it showed, the flowers were fair and fresh, apparently just gathered from the fields—a touching tribute of love for a lost but not forgotten little one. At least it took some trouble to gather those homely flowers — the homeliest of flowers — and bring them there; and the jam-pot was so clean, with a little moss carefully placed around it. That tiny cared-for grave touched a truly pathetic note, and the pathos of it seemed the greater owing to the bright joyous look and the green vitality of the sunlit country around. When my little life is over, I would desire nothing better to adorn my last resting-place than a few simple English buttercups and daisies gathered by loving hands—not mere bought flowers. Once in a churchyard I met a poorly-clad and sad-looking man with a bunch of freshly-gathered wild flowers. He looked so sad, I felt I must speak to him, for sometimes a word of sympathy helps to lessen a fellow-mortal's trouble; and I learnt from him that he was going to place them "on my loving wife's grave, the only creature that ever loved me"—what a sad life I felt was his —and as he spoke the tears came to his eyes. I thought he must only recently have lost his wife, but he told me she had been dead twenty-five long years, and during all that time he had never missed a day in visiting her grave and placing some flowers upon it; even in the winter he found something to take there. I am glad I spoke to him, for I think the few sympathetic words I ventured upon helped him a little to bear his burden.

Then we drove on to Lacock through a green and level lowland. Lacock, with its ancient, time-toned houses, some of stone, some of half-timber, and a few of the fifteenth century, so old a place is it. Lacock with its tall market-cross, restored but not all weathered grey like its surroundings, makes an ideal picture of an old-world village; a village that fascinates on account of its unspoilt ancientness. Lacock has the genuine flavour of the long-ago, a spot where the past prevails over the present, for on entering it you seem to have turned back the hand of Time two hundred years or more. The modern world vanishes from mind as though it were but a dream of ugliness, and you look upon a reality of beauty. The first house we came to, a building of half-timber, had a fine and a bold fifteenth-century projecting porch, with a room above lighted by a traceried window whose mullions were of oak; a beautiful and a well-proportioned building. Another old house had a fourteenth-century arched doorway of stone; indeed, there are several old doorways in the place deserving of study. The abbey barn that in turn became the market-house is, too, a curious building with a blocked-up archway at one corner of it. Why it was ever placed there is an architectural puzzle. Another old house is pointed out as having belonged to Daniel Chamberlain, who lived in Lacock in the eighteenth century, and who is an ancestor of Joseph Chamberlain, M.P. Lacock also boasts an ancient inn, "The George," to wit, and there may still be seen *in situ* the original wooden dog-spit wheel. A number of years ago I

saw one of these primitive wheels and spits complete and in working order in the very ancient "Star," a pilgrims' inn at Alfriston, a Downland village near Lewes. I know not where one may be found complete to-day out of a museum.

But interesting though the village of Lacock is, its interest is overshadowed by its abbey, I believe the best preserved conventual building in the kingdom as far as interior arrangements are concerned. An intelligent guide showed us over this, who added greatly to the pleasure of our visit, for as far as our knowledge extended we never found him make a mistake in describing anything. I would that there were more such guides as he. First he conducted us to the kitchen, that he informed us was "over six hundred years old," and we saw no reason to doubt his word and much to confirm it; this apartment is still in use and is still lighted by its original Gothic windows. Next we were shown the refectory and the dormitories; then we were conducted to the special guest chamber, where the abbess used to entertain her distinguished visitors. This is entered from the great hall. But the very beautiful and almost perfect cloisters are the gem of the place, stone groined throughout they are, with fan-like mouldings springing from their capitals, and at the intersection of the mouldings are elaborately carved bosses. In the south cloister are some of the original thirteenth-century pavement tiles, and on the floor is the flat monumental slab of the Countess of Salisbury, who became the first Abbess in 1238. This slab was removed from the church of

the convent when it was pulled down. Thus one generation builds with loving care a fane for Christian worship, doubtless deeming it would stand for ages, if not until "the crack of Doom," then another generation ruthlessly, unconcernedly levels it to the ground. Now we have to ask where the once stately building stood. Fortunately one generation cannot destroy the history that a preceding generation makes, that at least is beyond the despoiler's power.

In the east cloister are some early stone coffins with a recess cut in them for the head of the dead, but who were buried therein, no one now can tell, so impossible is it for even the lordly of the land to ensure an undisturbed resting-place for their bones. It may have been this feeling of uncertainty that caused Shakespeare to write that famous epitaph for himself to be read upon his tomb in Stratford-on-Avon church, and this he wrote in the plainest language that all might understand, for Shakespeare knew mankind. Then we were taken to the crypt, and next in order to the beautiful chapter-house, after which to the day- or warming-room of the nuns, for we were told that, even in the bitterest weather, this was the only apartment, excepting the kitchen of course, where a fire was allowed, so severe were the rules of the establishment. There our attention was called to a large stone tank of about twelve feet long, hollowed out of one huge block of stone, which is said to have been the nuns' bath; even on that warm summer morning it had a chilly look; in the winter time to

bathe therein must have been a penance. But the chief object of interest in the spacious chamber is a great iron cauldron that is supposed to have been used for cooking purposes, and is estimated to contain nearly seventy gallons. Around this runs the following inscription: "A Petro Wagherens in Mechlinia effvsus factvs ve fveram. Anno Domini millesimo qvingentesimo. Deo lavs et Gloria Cristo." Which I read in English: "I was made by Peter Wagherens of Mechlin in the year fifteen hundred. Praise to God and Glory to Christ." An atmosphere of the past prevails within the deserted and time-hallowed cloisters and chambers of Lacock Abbey. Unseen presences seem to linger there, as though the spirits of the long-departed nuns haunted it. Our footsteps echoed as we trod upon the cold stone pavements like some one treading near behind; indeed, we found ourselves involuntarily looking round ever and again to see if we were followed; but no one was there, it was only echoes that we heard, echoes that had a strange and hollow sound within the wall-girt stillness of the ancient abbey. If they were ghostly footsteps, they mocked us by stopping when we stopped; and a religious ghost would surely be more serious than to merely mock one.

After the dissolution of such religious establishments Lacock Abbey was sold in 1541 to Sir William Sherington, who converted it into a stately residence; his successor, Sir Henry Sherington, entertained Queen Elizabeth there in 1574. During this journey we came upon more places "good

Queen Bess" had visited than our general average. Then in the course of time Lacock Abbey became the property of Fox-Talbot, one of the early pioneers of photography, and who invented the process known by his name. Some time ago an unknown correspondent kindly sent me some prints of old buildings done from old wax negatives taken, I understood, by Fox-Talbot, and these prints possess a picturesque quality that somehow seems to evade the modern photographer in spite of his perfected process and apparatus. Two of these were respectively of Malmesbury Abbey and Malmesbury market-cross, one was of the quaint old "George" inn at Norton St. Philip in Somerset; and apart from their picturesque qualities the prints are of considerable interest as showing the slow but certain changes that take place in such old buildings during the years that pass. If only photography had been invented, say a couple of centuries earlier, what valuable records of past times might have been handed down to us.

Leaving Lacock, we set forth in search of Farleigh-Hungerford chapel, of which we had purchased a photograph at Chippenham, showing its armour-decked walls. Our way there led us through sleepy Melksham and prosperous Trowbridge, two uninteresting towns, and the latter was blocked with traffic as well as being uninteresting. At Trowbridge we asked our way, and had to ask it six times or more before we could find any one to direct us. Now that our roads are being used again for the purpose of long-distance travel, it would

be of great advantage to the stranger in a strange town if in the centre thereof a bold sign-post were displayed pointing the way to the various places out of it. This has been done at Bridgwater and a few other places, and I wish it were done in all others; for it is provoking to have to constantly stop to ask your way, and not always to find any one to tell you it. I once stopped in Reading to ask my road out to Hook. A policeman pointed his arm in one direction, and a passing butcher's boy in a cart, who overheard my query, pointed his hand in another; whereupon the policeman and the butcher's boy had a great dispute, which left me much in doubt. Then a cyclist appeared upon the scene, and he decided in favour of the policeman. Still we felt a little confused, but drove on and asked our way again of a coachman in a brougham standing by a house, when, according to him, it appeared that both the policeman and butcher's boy were wrong. We took our instructions from the coachman, who at last put us on the right road. So difficult is it at times to obtain clear instructions as to the way, just when amongst much traffic you particularly desire to get out of it, both on account of yourself and other users of the streets.

Once free of Trowbridge our road led us directly to Farleigh-Hungerford, the ancient home and fortress of the Hungerford family. We found their old castle standing on a wooded hill that rose sharply above the little river Frome. A charmingly picturesque spot. Ruined castle, rock, hill, wood, and winding river combined to make quite a

romantic picture, a picture not readily to be blotted out of memory. We found the great gateway tower with its door locked, and there being no one about, it was no use standing there, so we drove to the village inn near by, where we made inquiries as to how we might obtain admission to the ruins, and especially to the chapel. As good fortune had it, the innkeeper kept the keys, and these, after a moment's hesitation, he handed to us. I fancy the sight of our car without had something to do with his entrusting them to our keeping. "You will be very careful to lock the door behind you so that no one else may get in," said he. We gave him our word that we would, and that we would not run away with any of the armour, or do anything we ought not to do. So back we went, only too delighted to have the place to ourselves and to be able to inspect it at our leisure without a guide to trouble or to hurry us. We felt pleased to be trusted thus, and in return were generous in our tip. The man even apologised that he could send no guide, which apology we accepted with much grace.

The castle is a mere shell. Two towers, much in ruin, alone remain, and the walls between them are much broken. The ancient chapel, however, is fortunately in better preservation, and it still retains its roof, though the building is going slowly to mouldering decay. The chapel is enclosed by a parapeted wall, through which is an arched gateway. We had some trouble to open the chapel door, the rusty lock turned complainingly, the hinges creaked, but with a little coaxing we obtained admission to

FARLEIGH HUNGERFORD CASTLE CHAPEL.

the interior. To this we descended by some much worn steps, on one of which we noticed a deeply incised cross, and there before us we beheld the reality of our photograph. The light was dim, the atmosphere of the place damp and depressing, the gloom was profound, impressive. The long disused chapel had a pathetic, neglected look; a house of prayer wherein no one any longer prays, and going the way of all uncared-for things. We noticed a hole or two in the roof for the rain to come through, and the wet below these holes had stained the pavement. There around, hanging on the walls, we beheld a strange array of ancient armour rusting away. The pulpit was rotten, the steps to it had gone. The old font was there intact, for stone is more lasting than wood or iron. On the chancel wall still plainly to be seen was a large coloured fresco of St. George, on foot, slaying the dragon. How this fresco has lasted thus I cannot say, for the walls are damp, and one would imagine that no fresco would for so long have resisted such damp. Over the east window we also noticed a painted coat-of-arms that too has withstood the assaults of time in a surprising manner. The open oak-beamed roof above seems to the eye strong and substantial still, but this is probably only seeming. My photograph will, I trust, give some idea of this curious chapel. The most interesting view of the interior, showing the old altar tombs and chantry chapel, I failed to obtain owing to the bad light, also the greater display of armour on the south wall is missing in

my photograph, nor is the gloom of the interior suggested in it owing to the very long exposure I had to give the film to secure any result at all; but the gloom is there. So dark was the subject, that I could scarcely see anything on my ground-glass but the east window by which I focused it, trusting to chance for the rest.

In the chantry chapel to the left are the stately though decaying monuments of the Hungerfords, with their effigies upon them; their mortal remains lie in an open vault below, open, that is, from the exterior of the building. The earliest of these monuments is to Sir Thomas Hungerford, who died in 1389; another is to Sir Walter Hungerford, who died in 1596. Around his tomb runs an inscription beginning, "Tyme tryeth truth quod Walter Hungerford who lieth here." This inscription is curious, because two lines of it read in the usual manner from left to right, but the third line has to be read in reverse, from right to left. Still another is to "Edward Hungerford, knight, sonne to Walter Lord Hungerford . . . deceased the 5th daie of December 1607." And the last is to another Sir Edward Hungerford, who "Laid on this tomb you see the effigy . . . For God, His Country, His Family, he lived 52 years, And fell peacefully asleep, October 23rd, in the year of Salvation 1648." From the inscription it appears that "Margaret, Lady Hungerford, his beloved wife," caused this monument to be raised. "In her praise much might truly be said, but surviving she forbids it. Be this hereafter." Which modesty is

much to be admired, but, alas! the much that might truly be said of her is not recorded.

Then we left the chapel, the air of it was so damp and seemed so foul it depressed us; we were glad to get outside into the cheerful, healthful sunshine; it was like stepping forth from death to life. The chapel was but a mouldering tomb. Wandering round the exterior of the building, we came to the vault beneath the chantry chapel, which is open, the opening thereto being protected by some iron railings, and there we beheld a ghastly sight, a sight I have never beheld before, of leaden coffins all in a row that enclose the dust of the long dead Hungerfords. To add to the gruesomeness of the sight, the coffins, almost white with age, outline the shape of the human remains within. I afterwards learnt that the castle and chapel, its monuments and coffined dead, had been offered for sale, so that the purchaser might not only have obtained a historic castle, but ancestors as well, for I suppose they would be his ancestors if he paid for them! The parish church of Farleigh-Hungerford, which was built by Walter, Lord Hungerford, and was consecrated in 1443, is a plain building of no great interest, but over the outer porch is a stone with a puzzling contracted Latin inscription upon it and a cross on the top of this. The inscription is as follows:—

✠

Muniat Hoc Templū Cruce Glo-
Rificans Microcosmū: Q̄ Genuit
X̄pm Miseris P̄ce Fiat Asilum.

To translate which into English is no easy task; it is a little obscure. Perhaps it may be rendered thus—"May He who glorifies man (or this little world) by His Cross defend this Church. May she who bare the Christ by her prayer give refuge to the distressed."

From Farleigh-Hungerford we dropped down into a lonely, open country of meadows and woods. We had put our map away; it blew about in the wind and was a trouble, and as we had no point to make for there was no use in consulting it, so we just drove on, our road bearing southward, and that was all we knew or cared to know at the moment. Presently we noticed a finger-post with an arm marked "Frome" pointing in the direction we were driving. Therefore to Frome we went, passing first through the pleasant stone-built village of Beckington. There we stopped to photograph "Beckington Castle," a castle only in name, for it is a fine and unusually lofty old Jacobean house of many gables and many mullioned windows, the latter being without transoms. How the old house had come by the dignified name of castle no one appeared to know, excepting that "it had always been called so." However, we learnt that at one time the house had the reputation of being haunted, and solely on this account it remained untenanted for years. Now it is inhabited, and we understood ghostless; possibly the ghost found it poor sport haunting an empty house and sought other quarters.

Some time ago there appeared in a London paper a curious and mysterious advertisement

coming from one who announced himself as "The Original Haunted House Restorer and Ghost Eradicator." Calling himself "the original" suggests competition in the profession. I had almost a mind to write and ask him his fee, but then I had no ghost in my house to get rid of. I wish now I had, in spite of that, for his reply might have been interesting. In the old days the office was a priestly one and had to be well paid for. I presume there is no licence or examination required in order to become a "Ghost eradicator." I once heard of an Indian officer who effectually "eradicated" a ghost without calling for any professional assistance. He secured a very desirable house with a large garden at the end of a certain village for a mere song, as it had been empty for years solely on account of a most ill-mannered ghost who was reported to walk the house every night and scream and throw things at people; even the villagers gave the house a wide berth after dark. The house had a very bad reputation, not only locally, but far around. But the major got a firm from London to put it in thorough repair and redecorate it. Some days before he took possession he placed a target in his garden and, where the villagers could see him, began practising with a revolver at that target. He was a good shot and seldom missed the mark. Then he stuck up a bold notice on the garden wall that "Any ghost found wandering in this house or in this garden at night will be promptly shot." Local servants were not to be had for love or money, but nothing daunted, the major secured the services of

two Scotchwomen of iron nerves, and a family butler who did not believe in such nonsense, and no ghost ever troubled him. Then after a time he brought his family down, and more London servants, but never a sign of a ghost saw they.

I do not know if Beckington is famous for anything except that Thomas de Beckyngton was born there in or about 1390. He gave up the then dangerous game of politics and became a Bishop, first of Salisbury and then of Bath and Wells, and a great ecclesiastical builder besides. He has left his mark upon Wells Cathedral, and his heraldic device, or rebus, a beacon and a tun, appears on some of the Somerset churches. On leaving Beckington we noticed an exceptionally fine specimen of a gazebo. The church looked interesting, and we were told that there were some fine monuments in it; but one church a day was our rule, and our inspection of Farleigh-Hungerford chapel sufficed us for that day.

CHAPTER XIX

A land of sunshine—Milk from the cow at the door—Doulting church and tithe-barn—The monkish craftsman—Shepton Mallet market-cross—The romance of travel—Legends of Somerset—Rare old Jacobean carving—Pilton's monastic barn—A curious story of an abbey pulpit—The age of miracles.

Beyond Frome we found ourselves upon high ground and in a country somewhat bleak, but the sun shone brightly down and made all things pleasant. Our road afforded us many wide and welcome views stretching away to a far-off horizon where the hazy hills looked almost like jagged clouds, so faint a tint had they. At a spot by the road in front of a cottage we saw a novel sight, a cow being driven in a cart, and the cart was stopped by the cottage door; a man was milking the cow and selling the milk to the cottagers, who at least would know that the milk was genuine. It may be ignorance on my part, but I had no idea that such a thing was anywhere done.

Then we dropped rather steeply down into the primitive and picturesque village of Nunney, the grey gables of its stone-built houses peeping out of the leafy trees before us, and boldly over all rose the ruined towers of its ancient Edwardian castle, a castle of whose existence I was not aware till then,

for I had not even heard its name. We expected to find only a pretty village, and we found a fine old, though somewhat battered, castle besides, that gave a touch of romance to it. A pleasant little village is Nunney, with the charm of character about it. A wide stream runs through the place, which is crossed by a ford, one or two wooden footbridges, and an ancient one of stone. These with the old buildings around make attractive subjects both for painter and photographer; in fact they caused us to expend half a dozen photographic films upon them, though our supply was running low, and during the journey we made it a point never to expose a film unless we had a picture, or something of interest, before us.

Nunney Castle, placed down in a hollow, does not impress the observer in the same way as one boldly perched on a crag. Doubtless the low situation was chosen in order to secure a supply of water for a moat, where, too, it could not be drained dry. In those days the castle builder held great faith in a moat as a defensive aid, and I presume he knew his business. Nunney Castle takes the form of an oblong, with a great round tower at each angle; these towers are both bold and of so large a size as to appear out of proportion to the rest of the building, of which fact perhaps my photograph may give some idea. The floors of the castle were of wood, as is proved by the beam holes and the absence of vaulting. After a long and peaceful existence, Nunney Castle during the Civil Wars made its little history, the stock history of most English castles. It was garrisoned and held for the king, and

NUNNEY CASTLE.

after a stout resistance surrendered on favourable terms to the Parliamentarians under Fairfax.

After Nunney we came into a very pleasant land of great woods and green meadows, and beyond were girdling hills, now golden in the afternoon sunshine, now purple-grey under the cloud shadows that raked their sloping sides. It is the remembrance of a land like this that makes the Englishman feel, when far from his island home, that for tranquil beauty there is no country to compare with his own, no scenery so peace-bestowing. Then in this rural land we were surprised to find a tramway running across our lonely road; for, excepting a farmer's cart, nothing had we met on it for miles, and we rejoiced in its loneliness. This tramway led, we learnt, to the famous Doulting quarries, that have been worked, on and off, for centuries. The stones from it went to the building of Glastonbury Abbey, Wells Cathedral, and many Somerset churches, from which their durability may be judged. The modern architect might take a lesson from the ancients and go there for enduring material if he desires to build worthily.

Then we came to the little village of Doulting. I doubt if we should have stopped there, but that its beautiful church attracted us, because of its uncommon central octagonal tower, surmounted by an octagonal spire, a church with a distinct individuality. It possesses, moreover, a richly decorated Perpendicular porch worthy of a cathedral; indeed, the church itself might fairly be called a cathedral in miniature. In the porch are three finely

sculptured figures standing under three canopied niches, and we observed besides some rather quaint gargoyles. One twisting round a corner of the building showed the adaptability of the carver's genius to a perplexing position. I fancy the ancient craftsman must have enjoyed his task of overcoming, and that with marked success, his difficulty. Originally the gargoyle was simply a spout of stone, then the medieval sculptor saw his opportunity to express his inherent love of the grotesque upon it. Within the sacred edifice he was limited to very proper saints, and truth to tell his soul did not appear to go out to them; but externally he had his way, and joked in stone, as a worldly layman might joke, to his heart's delight. He threw his saints overboard in favour of grinning, good-natured looking demons that leer knowingly down at you from their wicked eyes. Many a time have I gazed at their comical creations with pure delight. Jovial souls were these old monks, I trow. And the charm of their clever creations is, they look like creatures that might actually exist could life be breathed into them; or, to put it another way, they might be demons that, once living, had been petrified and stuck up aloft to face all weathers for their misdeeds. Saints inside the church and sinners without, and the saints look so serious and the sinners so jolly.

We carefully searched the churchyard for any quaint epitaph, but in vain. One tombstone there, dated 1838, is inscribed to the memory of "A native of this village who had twice crossed the Equator." Manifestly that native was considered to have done

something wonderful to have his exploit recorded thus. Another inscription read:

> When I down in the churchyard lay,
> With mould upon my breast,
> Say not that I did ill or well,
> Only I did my best.

I do not know if this be original, but it struck me as above the general quality of tombstone versification. Then at the other side of the church we came unexpectedly upon a fine sanctuary cross with the emblems of the Passion carved round the base of it. The church is dedicated to "the good St. Aldhelm," who was seized with a fatal illness in the village, and by his own request was carried into the then wooden church to die, making "his soul an offering to Heaven, in the year of our Lord's Incarnation 709, on the vigil of St. Augustine."

As we were about to remount the car our eyes chanced to notice, across a field, the long roof and grey gables of a great stone-built barn, which we judged must be a tithe-barn from the size and substantial building of it, and on inquiry we learnt that this lordly barn formerly belonged to Glastonbury Abbey. Those medieval monks, if they made sure of heaven, did not disdain the good things of this world, and this was one of their many storehouses wherein they garnered what they had not troubled to sow nor toiled to reap. It is of generous dimensions, generous enough to hopelessly dwarf an ordinary farm-house barn, and it looks little the worse for the centuries that have come and gone since it was first erected there, so enduringly did

the old monkish masons build—I wish they had built the house I live in! Those monks had their day; their once stately abbey is in hopeless ruin, but their fine barn remains. Such is the irony of fate. Even the far-famed and worshipped relics treasured within that glorious fane of Glastonbury could neither protect themselves nor it from spoliation—

> Not great Arthur's tomb, nor holy Joseph's grave
> From sacrilege had power their sacred bones to save.

Yet the simple barn stands unhurt, though it housed no sacred bones, no miracle-working relics enclosed in glorious shrines to afford it protection.

From Doulting to Shepton Mallet is a short three miles; and at that ancient, sleepy, narrow-streeted town we found a quiet, old-fashioned inn facing its market-place and market-cross, and there we stopped the night. The placid old town appealed to us, there was such a sentiment of repose about it, a thing so hard to find to-day, it was so peacefully unprogressive, in no way beautiful, but simply natural. There are plenty of unrestful modern towns in the land for those who love them, but for my pleasure give me a dreamy, tiny old country town where the centuries come and go with little sign of outward change, a town without suburbs, a town that long ago has finished growing, and where the easy-going inhabitants count time by the hours and not by minutes. At Shepton Mallet I overheard the following: "What's the time, mate?" And the mate replied, "It's going six." Yet it wanted five-and-twenty minutes to that hour.

MARKET-CROSS, SHEPTON MALLET.

I have no doubt that had it been five-and-twenty minutes past six the reply would have been, "It's gone six." In such drowsy places you realise the value of leisure, the joy of having little to do and plenty of time to do it in. Life seems longer when you take it leisurely; and who would not wish to lengthen life? One can live but once, and why live in a fuss and a hurry. There are not a few unfortunate people who always appear to me to be in a fever of unrest, ever rushing about as though their chief desire is to be somewhere else than where they chance to be at the moment.

The market-cross is a hexagonal structure with an arched shelter below, as Leland says in his *Itinerary*, "for poure market folkes to stand dry when rayne cummeth." The cross has not been improved by restoration, still it makes a pleasing picture and gives a bit of welcome character to the place. Just beyond it we noticed some curious timber stalls of carved oak roofed with red ridged tiles, where, I presume, the market-folk offer their goods. I was informed that before the cross was restored "and made as good as new" there was a brass plate let in the central pillar bearing this inscription:

Of yr Charyte pray for the Soules
Of Walter Bukland and Agnys hys
Wyff wt whoys goods thys Crosse
Was made in the yere of or Lord God
M V C. Whoys obbytt shal be
Kepte for Ever in thys parisshe
Churche of Shepton Mallet
ye XXVIII. day of November
Whoys Soules Jhū pardon.

"For ever" is a large order, till the end of the world, I suppose, good Walter Bukland meant. I wonder how long he thought the world was going to last. Still, the cross he caused to be built yet stands, though the very thorough restoration has improved the look of age out of it. Indeed, I imagine it must have been practically rebuilt. This should not have been needed, as we were told that there is an ancient "Cross Charity," being an endowment made for the sole purpose of keeping the cross in good repair.

Our little sitting-room overlooked the market-place, and during the evening we had entertainment enough in watching the movements and the manners of the townsfolk gathered there to gossip, for Shepton Mallet wakes up from its day slumbers at evening; I fancy that is the only time there is any real life in the town. Then gradually over the scene there fell the soft shadows of twilight, and in that poetic light, neither night nor day, the cross loomed up before us vague and mysterious. By some strange illusion as the darkness increased the cross seemed to grow in size, just as the apparent height of a mountain is increased by mist, all trivial details were blotted out, night had hidden any ugliness there was in the scene, the lights of lamps began to gleam through the many-paned windows of the dimly-outlined houses around, and we allowed ourselves the illusion of being travellers of the olden time taking our rest in a medieval city. Such was the glamour of the gloaming, the conjuring power of the grey gloom that comes with the

evening. To indulge one's fancy thus is to add to the romance of travel, and without cost.

Superstition and a belief in witchcraft die hard in Somerset; indeed they are by no means dead yet. Somerset, too, is a land of folk-lore and forgotten folk-songs with their quaint melodies; curious old-time customs, too, still flourish there. Of their superstitions the country people are loath to talk to strangers, still I managed to unearth a few, perhaps because I was honestly interested in the subject, and threw no manner of doubt upon the strange relations made to me. Here is a truly weird one, the like of which I have never heard before. "If you have any relation buried in the churchyard, and you stand quietly in it at midnight on a certain day of the year,"—I regret that I have forgotten the day,—"you may see his soul rise out of the grave and go into the church; and if two spirits come out of the grave, you may know that you will die during the year." On asking my informant if she had ever done this, and spoke from actual experience, she had to confess that she had not, as she was too much afraid to do so. "But other folk I know have, and have seen the souls rise out of their graves, so it must be true."

Then in some parts the woods are haunted by ghostly huntsmen and yeth hounds, which many of the country folk declare they have both seen and heard. Yeth hounds being the spirits of unbaptized children, which in the form of dogs rove about the woods on winter nights making wailing noises.

Some of the lonely country roads we learnt were haunted by a headless horseman, who would suddenly come upon a belated and terrified traveller and follow him all the way home, though, beyond the fright he gave, this special ghost appears to do no harm. Possibly the story originated in a drunken man who "saw things." Other men under the same conditions, knowing what to expect, may also have undergone similar experiences, so the story once started and confirmed soon became established. It is much easier to start a superstition than to kill it. Then there is the tradition, that I have already given in full in a former book, and so will only mention briefly here, of a Quantock blacksmith who was called up late one night to shoe a strange traveller's horse, and the strange traveller turned out to be the Devil, as the blacksmith discovered by catching sight of his cloven foot. The Devil offered the blacksmith a handful of gold for what he had done, but fortunately for him the blacksmith would not touch it, or he would have sold his soul to the Evil One.

A Somerset parson told me a strange story of a certain prosperous Somerset farmer that was told to him, so that I relate it at third hand, though as faithfully as I can, and without any intentional embellishment, for full well I know that, unlike the proverbial rolling-stone, stories do gather substance as they pass along from one teller to another, a fact finely exemplified in the well-known fable of "The Three Black Crows." But to retell the tale. The farmer in question took a farm in a locality fresh to

him. Shortly after his coming there, one dark winter's night he heard the sounds of many horses galloping with a great clattering down the lonely lane that led past his farm; his dogs rushed out into the lane and began to bark furiously, and would not be quieted, so the farmer declared; but though he went out after them to ascertain what was happening, he saw nothing, yet he plainly heard the sounds gradually dying away in the distance. The circumstance puzzled him much, and next morning he asked a cottager living near by who they could be galloping so furiously down the lane over night. The cottager told him they were the ghosts of the men and horses who once fled from the battlefield of Sedgemoor. "If you had lived here as long as us, you would have known that on that one night of the year they can always be heard a-galloping down the lane, though invisible to mortal eyes. We always listen for them on that night, and always hear them." Manifestly a case of "what the ear listens for it hears." The farmer, whose name and place of abode were given to us, does not like to talk about the matter, we were told, for fear of being laughed at, but, in private conversation with the parson, he declared he was convinced of the truth of the happening. I was much tempted to hunt up that farmer and hear the story at first hand from him, but, as the parson told me the story in confidence, to show what a hold superstition had on the country folk, I felt I was not entitled to do this. So that I merely tell the tale as it was told to me.

A curious custom of many cottagers is, before retiring to rest for the night, to rake the ashes level on the hearth, and then to make the figure of a cross upon them, that their dwelling may be protected till daylight from fire, thieves, and illness. Possibly a survival of some pre-Reformation superstition. I could go on filling pages with such extracts from my note-book, jotted down therein as they came to me, but *quantum sufficit*. There is something about these old superstitions, legends, and curious customs that reveals the inner mind of the Somerset folk, and that, to me, suggests a Celtic strain. Some of the legends, however, have a genuine Scandinavian flavour, such as that of the monster dragon that haunted the Quantock woods, which was eventually slain by a local St. George called Woodman; and for a long time the poor mothers used to quiet their children by telling them, if they were naughty, the dragon would get hold of them.

But after this long digression, to return to Shepton Mallet and ourselves. On glancing at some photographs of local places and scenes in a shop window the next morning, we noticed one of a church interior that attracted our attention on account of its showing a wealth of exceptionally fine carved oak work. This church we learnt was at Croscombe, a little village but two miles away; we thereupon determined to stroll so far before resuming our journey. I bless the local photographers, for they have revealed many an interesting spot to me. Croscombe turned out to be a

JACOBEAN CARVING IN CROSCOMBE CHURCH.

thoroughly old-world village of the Tudor times, nestled in a narrow valley, through which a tuneful little river runs, turning here and there an ancient mill, and on either hand rise wooded hills enclosing it from the outer world. A bit of old England with the bloom of centuries upon it, set in the heart of the new, and very peaceful it looks and full of character. In the centre of the village stand the three worn steps and stump of its ancient market-cross, and close beside is the village inn, that was once a part of a religious house, and still possesses some fine carved stone ceilings and other interesting fifteenth-century detail. The place has a veritable atmosphere of ancientness, and all the charm of it.

Somerset is famous for its fine country churches, but amongst the number the interior of Croscombe church, with its elaborate and perfect Jacobean carving, is by far the most beautiful of all that I have seen, and I have seen not a few. I will not say the most interesting, for that is another matter. The pulpit, dated 1616, is truly a notable specimen of carved oak work, with its ornate sounding-board surmounted by a pelican in its piety. The roof, too, is a masterpiece of craftsmanship, and the richly decorated pews, with their sunk panels, are no less worthy of admiration. But I think the glory of the church is its truly splendid open carved chancel screen, crowned with the royal coat-of-arms boldly executed. The rare and comfortable beauty of this church interior may perhaps in some measure be gleaned from my photograph, though at the best

this is but a suggestion of its rich decoration, for owing to the disturbing cross lights it was difficult to obtain a satisfactory result.

It is a shame that so much delightful Jacobean carved oak work should in the dark ages—architecturally speaking—have been ruthlessly torn out of our churches on the paltry plea that it was not in keeping with its Gothic surroundings. After all, an ancient church is history written in stone and wood, the history of many generations and of many minds; the preciousness of such a building is not in a perfect style, but in the varied story it has to tell, as plainly to be read by the cultured man as any printed page; and to rob a history of one of its chapters is to rob it of much, even to making of it meaningless. If one begins to remove past examples of work of any period, provided the examples be worthy of the age, from our churches on the plea of uniformity, then, in all consistency, many a glorious fane would have all its Gothic work done away with and be restored backwards to its first stern Norman simplicity. The value of a building is not in its stones or its wood, but in the individuality of the man expressed therein. You might as well have English history stopped in the days of Elizabeth. But you cannot arrest Time thus. And the coming generations have to be considered; they may even deem the Jacobean work we have so ruthlessly destroyed as full of artistic feeling and as decorative as the Gothic, and despise us for despising it. Is our age so artistic that we can set ourselves up as supreme judges in the matter? Why,

we have not even an architecture of our own worthy of being called architecture.

In the sitting-room of our inn at Shepton Mallet we discovered amongst the odds and ends of literature scattered about there a modern guide-book to the county, presumably left in forgetfulness by a recent tourist, so we took the opportunity of finding out what it said about Shepton Mallet. What it said was not very informing nor interesting, but then Shepton Mallet is hardly a tourist town, so a guide-book compiler might think it not worth wasting many words about. Still, our glance through its pages was not wholly unrewarded, for we learnt that at Pilton, near by, there was a beautiful and well-preserved specimen of a tithe-barn, besides an interesting church with a tie-beam timber roof, and a fine old Jacobean pulpit dated 1618. So we thought we would see Pilton; what the guide-book said about it was brief but suggestive, and thither next we drove, after consulting our map as to the way. Our road led us through a beautiful country and a hilly one, with a look of Devonshire about it, and Devonshire was visible in the distance. And this is what we saw—

> Highlands and hills that far away
> Rise blue and quiet from the moors;
> Slopes red with fallows, green with leas,
> Lands roll'd and slanted; field and flood;
> White halls and, over villages,
> Towers, here and there, of God.

Pilton we found to be an ancient village beautifully situated on a slope, but of itself uninteresting.

There was the tithe-barn, not of great size truly for such a structure, still architecturally it is one of the finest in England, I think, indeed, only outrivalled in this respect by the famous one at Glastonbury. Both buildings bear much resemblance to each other, and were doubtless the work of the same master designer, for their chief details are practically identical. I imagine, however, that the barn at Pilton was not a tithe-barn in reality, for the monks of Glastonbury had a considerable estate there, so that it was more probably a store-house for the produce of their property.

The door of the church porch was locked, but wandering round the building, we found a smaller door on the north side unfastened, so by this we gained access to the interior. We noted the fine roof there with a number of carved oak angels, some coloured, forming its supports; but the feature of the church is its rare old carved-wood screen with its enriched cornice of delicately-traced vine leaves; this encloses a little chantry chapel. Then we looked for the "fine old Jacobean pulpit," and looked in vain; what we saw was a modern stone pulpit, dated 1871. (I am almost tempted to write a modern stone vulgarity.) But where is the Jacobean pulpit gone? and why, I wonder, was it turned out?

Westminster Abbey formerly possessed a fine Jacobean pulpit which, like many others, was improved away, but fortunately found a home in Trottiscliffe church, near Maidstone. The Abbey architect wanted "to get rid of it," as he expressed

it! The manner of its disappearance has been left on record, and is curious. "When preparations were being made for the coronation of George IV., the architect employed by the then Dean and Chapter of the Abbey said to Mr. Seager, who was squire of the village at the time, 'I say, Seager, do you want a pulpit?' 'I don't know that I do,' Seager replied. 'Well, if you do,' replied the architect, 'you can go and take the one away from the Abbey; I want to get rid of it.' Accordingly Seager agreed to fetch it, and brought it on a wagon to Trottiscliffe. The sounding-board was overlooked, and the Dean and Chapter were so annoyed when they learnt that the pulpit had been removed without their authority, that they refused to part with the sounding-board. Eventually, however, the architect remarked, 'I say, Seager, why don't you have that sounding-board and make your pulpit complete? It is in the crypt, and you know where the key of the crypt is kept.' Seager took the hint, sent a wagon to the Abbey again, and brought the sounding-board to Trottiscliffe."

Leaving Pilton, we soon reached that home of legends, historic Glastonbury and its ruined abbey, that erst enshrined the relics of many saints, relics that in the medieval days wrought many miracles, for "the saint who worked no miracles had few pilgrims," and was not profitable to the church. The devout monks even deemed it an act of piety to invent miracles when they did not occur, and they were generous with their inventions; some uncharitable critics even aver that the monks, in

the cause of the good of the church, invented them all. They lived in an age when the ignorant folk marvelled at nothing; for then so many marvellous things happened, according to the veracious monks, that the poor folk ceased to marvel any more, and took them all as a matter of course.

CHAPTER XX

"The island-valley of Avilion"—The modern tourist *versus* the medieval pilgrim—A picturesque manor-house—The fabled West—The glamour of place—The romance of the road—Barrington Court—The charm of the country town—Montacute—House mottoes, old and new.

So slumbering in the soft sunshine of that ideal June day—a day when the sky above was as blue as the summer sea, and the clouds sailing gaily across it were as white as new-fallen snow—we left legended Glastonbury and

> . . . the island-valley of Avilion,
> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
> Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
> And bowery billows crown'd with summer sea.

Now an American lady who had been touring through "dear old England," as she kindly called it, complained bitterly to me of Tennyson for singing thus of the fair valley of Avilion, for when she was there she had never—"not even in my own land where we do things on a big scale"—seen the rain come down so determinedly, so much so that it spoilt all her expected delight in the romantic spot. She even called Shakespeare to account, too (she was well versed in the poets of the land she

was exploring), for comparing the English rain to "the quality of mercy," that "droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven." She experienced no mere dropping or gentleness in the rain that poured down upon her devoted head that unhappy day at Glastonbury. I gathered from what she further said that she genuinely expected to find, at Glastonbury at least, a summer land given over to perpetual sunshine and peace, the one rainless spot in England, hence her grievous disappointment. But rain is no respecter of persons, not even of American tourists.

I tried to reason with her that, if no rain fell there, the "deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns" valley would be but a parched desert on which nothing green would grow, explaining politely that in this imperfect world one must pay for beauty, even at the small price of a wet day occasionally. But nothing that I could say would exonerate Tennyson and even Shakespeare from blame. "Tennyson declares that no rain falls there, and it does." So I gave up the discussion. "I will never believe in poets again," continued she; "they will have much to answer for when they meet Peter at the gate of Paradise." And yet, when I come to consider it, many are the times I have found myself in that delectable valley of Avilion, and I have always found it basking in brilliant sunshine, so that my impression of the fair spot is the same as Tennyson throws over it. He is a poor traveller who grumbles at the weather. I have long ago learnt to take it as it comes, smilingly. When God

sends rain, it must be right; rain freshens up the country, it allays the dust, and makes one enjoy the more the fair days that follow; that's the way to look at it. I am inclined to agree with the philosopher who says "there is no such thing as bad weather, only a variety of weather."

The modern tourist probably comes to Glastonbury's ruined abbey in greater numbers than came the medieval pilgrim to the world-famous fane when in its full glory, but unfortunately the modern tourist is not so picturesque a being as I imagine the ancient pilgrim was; he adds no touch of romance to the spot. What would the lordly abbots think, I wonder, could they come to life again and see the magnificent abbey they erected *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*—doubtless deeming it would last till the end of the world,—in hopeless ruin, and turned into a sort of peep-show, with admission at so much a head? Here again is a grand opportunity for moralising, but I refrain.

Leaving Glastonbury's desecrated fane, where now

> No bells are ringing,—no monks are singing,
> When the moonlight falls around,

we soon arrived on the top of the Polden Hills, the Hog's Back of Somersetshire, hills that rise isolated out of the low, level lands around, like an island rises out of the sea.

About five miles from Glastonbury a lane to the right runs down to Sharpham Manor, a picturesque old house built by Abbot Beere, that famous builder of ancient days, to retire to occasionally, and there his

successor, Abbot Whiting, the last of the Glastonbury abbots, was arrested and conveyed to the Tower, and afterwards "put to death on Tor Hill," in sight of the abbey he loved so well, his crime consisting, according to Froude, "of being more faithful to the Church than to the State,"—a sad ending to the proud rule of the Glastonbury abbots, over whose wide dominion erst even "the king's writ did not run." In this old manor-house Henry Fielding the author was born in 1707. So it is a house that, besides its present picturesqueness, can boast of an interesting and historic past.

It was a delightful drive we had along the wooded summit of those Polden Hills. That day we were the sole travellers thereon, and the beauty of the drive and the peacefulness of it has often since come back to me as a refreshing memory; and a pleasant memory is a precious possession; it is one of those few things of which the world can never rob us. Friends we all lose, but memories last our little lives. Here and there from the top of the hills were bridle-roads that led to the country below, locally termed, we learnt, "halter-paths." The route the pilgrims took to Canterbury is known to this day as the "Pilgrims' Way," but the route the pilgrims took to Glastonbury was curiously called the "Prayer Way." Somerset, that land of the Fabled West, retains her individuality of expressions and her old-world beliefs—a happy land where romance lingers yet.

Then as we drove along, on a desolate wind-swept spot we came to what appeared to be a

A CURIOUS CONCEIT: A HOUSE BUILT LIKE A CHURCH.

little lonely church by the wayside, and we wondered where its worshippers came from, for few and scattered were the habitations around. We pulled up to inspect the building ; its isolation appealed to us. There close by we noticed a farm labourer leisurely at work in a field, for Somerset is a county where all things are done leisurely. He looked up at the car and bade us good-day. After responding to his salutation, we asked him the name of the church. "Bless you, that baint a church at all," replied he ; "that be a private house." We felt surprised. Then we learned that it had been built in this strange fashion some years ago. A curious fancy, and not one to my mind; still, it forms a rather picturesque feature in the landscape, and a man with a whim to build an eccentric home might easily have constructed an eyesore. We were tempted to take a photograph of this quaint dwelling, which will serve to show how church-like it is, so much so that it might have deceived more experienced travellers than ourselves.

Soon afterwards we dropped gradually down from the top of the low hills into the level country below, and presently we passed through dreary, fen-like Sedgemoor, where the last battle on English ground was fought, a spot whose only interest is historical. Now a grey town, overhung with the haze of smoke above came in sight, and thither our road took us whether we would or no ; there was no other road to take. This town proved to be Bridgwater, which we had visited on a previous journey, though coming to it by another way. We had seen Bridg-

water and all it had to show, and felt no desire to see it again, so we drove on without stopping there, and got out of the place by the Taunton road. It might have been any other road for aught we cared; but it chanced to be the one to Taunton, and this we accepted contentedly for a time.

We had struck upon the old Exeter highway, —an excellent highway, broad, well kept, and smooth of surface, but hot and dusty that day, bustling with traffic too. We did not crave for so much company, we longed again for the quiet of the rural roads and the peace of them; so after a few miles and before reaching Taunton we turned to the left, and found by an obliging sign-post that we were on the way to Ilminster. So to Ilminster we went, one of those little, old-fashioned towns that have done growing; uncommercial, unprogressive, attractive only for its naturalness. It has no beauty, yet it possesses the negative virtue of not being ugly. Our road there proved to be a pleasant one and strangely deserted; for miles we met no other wayfarers, not even a motor car.

We were in a land where farming was the only industry, an industry we could not exist without, in spite of which fact it does not seem to be a very profitable one; even to get a bare living at it, one farmer declared to me, "you have to sell your best and live on your worst." But all farmers appear to be pronounced pessimists. The crops around us looked flourishing, the weather was favourable, so espying a portly farmer leaning over a gate, we ventured to remark to him cheerily, "Fine growing

weather." "Makes the weeds grow," responded he laconically. One farmer confided to me that the only way to make farming pay was to take pupils and teach them an unprofitable trade! Yet the majority of farmers I meet look portly and prosperous; still they one and all have the same depressing tale to tell.

Talking to a land agent one day, he told me that the great difficulty the farmers had to contend with was the scarcity of labour. The young men in the country, said he, either rush off to the towns or emigrate, leaving only the old and the lazy behind. "It's a serious thing for the country, and I see no cure for it. What strikes me as so serious is, that it is the young, energetic, and enterprising men who emigrate, the life-blood of the country; the worthless stay and breed a degenerate race. Many men who have saved a little—the best men we have, that is—go off to Canada or to some other colony, where they can get their own farms free. In nearly every village you may find placards posted up giving glowing accounts of 'The Golden West,' and the grants of 'the finest farming land in the world' to be had there for the mere cultivation of them." I have seen those tempting placards boldly displayed in many a remote village, and few are the villages from which at some recent time sturdy youths, and even whole families, have not gone "West."

The changeful scenes, the varying incidents, and the revelations of the road are far more interesting to me than any novel, however good that novel

may be. On the road it is always the unexpected that is happening, and following it you have the never-failing feeling that you may be driving into romance, for before you lies the unknown, pregnant with possibilities. It is the eternal hope, in spite of constant disappointments, of meeting with some adventure of however mild a nature that urges one on and on. The call of the far-away will not be denied. What if for days past your wanderings have been unrewarding, is there not always the promise of the morrow? Nothing, not even love, is more delusive than distance wherein you trust to discover the Arcadia and the people of your dreams. Even failures innumerable to discover that delectable land leaves your faith in discovering it on some future day unshaken, so the quest goes on unceasingly. This search after the unattainable is the true sentiment of travel; therein lies the charm of the road, the irresistible attraction of it.

An old wayside coaching inn with its gathered traditions, its weather-beaten front, and faded swinging sign, an inn of the sort that the wayfarer so often comes upon, always seems to me to possess vast potentialities of romance; its ancient chambers are haunted with memories, you know not what fate or company may meet you there, and the disappointment of one day is forgotten on the following morning when you have a fresh world before you and the glamour of it. These old-time inns of the right sort, with their unrecorded happenings, how strongly they appeal to the imagination of the sentimental traveller; they are still making history,

and maybe weaving new traditions; romance slumbers within their walls, and merely bides its time of awakening.

Writing of two of these ancient inns, the one at the Hawes and the other at Burford Bridge, Stevenson says, "I have lived at both in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling had me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worthy of remark. The man or the hour had not yet come; but some day, I think, a small boat shall put off from Queensferry fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman on a tragic errand will rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford." Such is the power of an ancient inn over the receptive mind. Alas! the ubiquitous motor car has robbed many a one of its pleasing illusion of remoteness, an illusion to be cherished whenever possible in these days when the world has grown so small. A time there was when the Land's End had a far-off sound; now it is the resort of the day tripper; and even distant Japan has become a touring ground. The railway was bad enough in the spoiling of this illusion of remoteness, but it did not come to the inn; so, comfortably harboured beneath its sign, you could conveniently forget all about it. Now the motor car with the hoot of its horn comes to the very inn door. But there be motorists and motorists. A goodly few are genuine travellers and not mere excursionists,

and one always respects the genuine traveller. Some motorists have journeyed far and long, fighting through storms and losing their way crossing desolate moors, experiencing delays and troubles on the road, arriving late with mud-stained cars and lamps alight at some lonely inn seeking there rest and shelter for the night, and glad to find it. To such the romance of the road still clings, they are true travellers and bring a spirit of adventure with them.

On arriving at Ilminster we found that it was market-day there, and upon a market-day even a small town has its streets uncomfortably crowded; so to avoid the confusion of farmers' conveyances and straying cattle, we did not drive through the place, but took a narrow road we happily noticed to our left. And glad we were we took it, for in two or three miles it led us to the out-of-the-world village of Barrington, where we discovered a little old church without aisles and with a central octagonal tower in place of the usual square one placed at one end of the building. It is a church with some character, and shows certain originality of design.

Many of our churches, beautiful though they be, are inclined to conform too strictly to the prevailing type of the district, so to find one boldly departing from this was refreshing. There is a great virtue in originality, when it does not descend to freakishness, as is the unfortunate tendency of to-day; the old builders were too intelligent to sin thus; they built with cultured reasonableness.

At the farther end of the village we espied the

grey gables of a large and lordly mansion, fallen, alas! into sad decay, a mansion in which, before its glory had departed, royalty might well have been entertained, so grand a look had it even in its dishonoured state. Manifestly it once had been the home of some great family worthy to compare with Hatfield and Montacute; now the rough fields come up to its ancient front, without even the sign of a garden between, and unheeded weeds flourish where a garden should be. At the time of our coming, cows and sheep were grazing close to its time-worn and time-stained walls. Upon the first glance at it the house appeared deserted; some of its mullioned windows were boarded up, and no smoke uprose from any chimney; there was no sign of life within. In spite of which, on nearer approach we found that a part of the once magnificent mansion was inhabited, the rest being desolate, and that now it had degenerated into a mere farm-house. A noble dwelling, wherein doubtless in the days gone by there had been many merry meetings and feastings, now going the inevitable way of all uncared-for things. A pathetic sight. On inquiry we were told that this was Barrington Court; then I remembered that I had heard of the ancient house long ago from an antiquarian friend as being one of the finest old Tudor homes in the kingdom, though then somewhat ruinous, a stately home of the past that, did my wanderings ever take me in its locality, I should on no account miss seeing; and here I was actually and unexpectedly before it. Probably my pleasure was the greater for coming

upon this architectural gem unawares than if I had gone purposely in search of it.

Barrington Court is a most beautiful example of a stately Tudor mansion, picturesquely impressive with its many gables, its wealth of windows, its numerous twisted chimneys, and its ornamented pinnacles. A rare specimen of old-time architecture built in "the spacious days" of Queen Elizabeth, when English domestic architecture was at its prime, and built in the shape of the letter E, as many a stately home then was, doubtless in compliment to that great Queen. There the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth was entertained in princely state by its then owner in 1680.

I was informed that the estate has been purchased by the "National Trust for Places of Historic Interest," and I hope therefore that this storied and beautiful old home may be preserved from further hurt for the benefit of future generations, as well as that of the present day, and also that it may be open to inspection. I regret to say we were unable to view the interior, though it belongs to the National Trust as aforesaid; we were politely informed that the house was a private residence, and that it was inconvenient to show us over it, so there was nothing to do but to depart and put up with our disappointment as best we could. I was afterwards told that the house within is in a sad condition, being so gutted and spoiled that little there remains of interest. Barrington Court is far from anywhere, for Ilminster hardly counts, so small a place is it, and out of the beaten track of travel,

but for those who are interested in past-time domestic architecture, Barrington Court is well worth finding and seeing.

Beyond Barrington we made our way by devious lanes to South Petherton; at least the lanes took us there, for, as usual, we had no idea where we were going, only a sense of direction. South Petherton we found to be a small town with a noble church and some rather quaint old houses. Somerset is a county of tiny towns, and we enjoyed the pleasantness of them; only when an ancient town begins to grow and flourish does it become ugly. These little unprogressive country towns have a distinctive character and a dignity of their own, and the charm that comes of those qualities; they are not featureless collections of houses, so you retain a pleasant memory of them on account of their individuality; no one resembles the other, and being so small you can comprehend them as a whole, with generally a fine church as the central feature.

These half-forgotten country towns, quiet, neat, and oftentimes quaint besides, are always a delight to me, chiefly perhaps because they are, in a restless age, so eminently restful. But to realise their pleasantness you must stay awhile in them; they do not reveal their attractions to the hasty passer-by, and two or three days is none too long for such a stay, and even a whole week might prove too short. And therein you may often chance upon an old-fashioned hostelry, and enjoy the calm and the comfort of it. Once when staying at an ancient hostelry in a sleepy little town, away in the distant

shires far from London, it happened that the only other visitor there was a man of the world well known in society, and he confided to me that, once every year for a whole fortnight, he came to that remote inn for a real rest, glad to escape for a time from the fashionable crowd, and afterwards equally glad to return to it. "No one knows me in the place," he explained, "no one would dream to find me here. I enjoy the seclusion of it, safe and far removed from the fashionable crowd. I call it my rest cure," he added, laughing. I confess that I was rather astonished at this meeting and revelation, though I find so many things to surprise me when I travel that I have almost given up being surprised at anything.

On another occasion, at another inn of the same kind and of similar situation, I discovered staying there a well-known author who had elected to take up his temporary abode in that little country town, there to finish his important work undisturbed. At such inns you may obtain all the quiet you wish for, at least if you indulge in the luxury of a sitting-room; and with this added luxury you will in every probability find your scale of expenditure one of retrenchment compared with living in dull and dreary seaside lodgings and the doubtful cooking of them. I have oftentimes, when uncertain where to go for a day or two's change, hied me away by grace of the motor car to some small country town that I have never visited before, and taken my chance of the inn there; thus with little thought or trouble have I found fresh, unhackneyed

surroundings, and "taverns new" wherein to take my ease. And vastly did I enjoy those unconventional outings.

In these tranquil country towns I have not unfrequently come upon that fast-disappearing and delightful individual the cultured seller of old books. There are plenty of sellers of old books who are not cultured, but the man I have in mind and rejoice to meet is one who loves books—good books, that is; the others he scorns—better than all else in the wide world, and even seems loath to part with them, though he gains his living by so doing. He will chat to you by the hour about his favourite authors and their works, if you find favour with him, and you may learn much from his talk, for it is often learned and always interesting, and this without a hint of his wishing you to make a purchase. Now and again he will show you some valued volume, handling it with loving care, as a mother might handle her first-born; he will turn over its ancient pages carefully and leisurely, and point you out a special passage here and there for your appreciation, and you would be an unsympathetic soul if you did not enter into his restrained joy and pride in its possession. Should you offer to purchase it, even though the price seem high, he will still fondle the treasured volume, looking inquiringly at you all the while, as though wondering whether you were worthy to have such a treasure entrusted to your keeping. Once I spent a whole delightful morning chatting with one of these second-hand booksellers of the old school in

his tiny shop, where, however, many quaint and rare tomes graced its crowded and dusty shelves; and when I offered to purchase a little odd volume—not that I specially desired to purchase it, but because I thought to make some slight return for my long morning's excellent entertainment—its grey-haired owner exclaimed, "I suppose I must part with it. To you the price is ten-and-sixpence. I would not sell it to every one for that, and to some people I would not sell it at all; they would not appreciate it." Then patting the tiny volume as one would pat an intimate friend, he slowly and carefully wrapped it up, first writing something on a bit of paper which he placed inside. I thought this was a receipt for my money, but I afterwards discovered what he wrote was, "Will pay 10s. 6d. back for it at any time." I long to restore that little book to him without any money return if I could discover a way to do so without giving offence or hurting his feelings.

Driving on, in our aimless fashion, we presently drove into a quaint and ancient village of picturesque stone-built houses grouped around a street so wide that it looked almost like a market-place. There, just outside the village, we espied, pleasantly situated in a wooded park, a fine old Elizabethan mansion of many shapely gables and many-paned mullioned windows. A stately mansion of the olden time with the bloom of centuries upon it; a mansion that was something more than a mere dwelling, for it was a veritable romance in stone, a picture to look upon. Then we discovered that we were at

Montacute. Not often is the traveller so fortunate as to come unexpectedly upon two such beautiful old homes as Barrington Court and Montacute in so short a drive one of the other. Fate was more than usually kind to us that morning. I wonder if England will ever again breed such architects as helped to glorify the reign of "good Queen Bess." Perfect masters of their art were they, and they were happy in having clever craftsmen under them. Montacute, as every one knows who knows anything of England, with its terraces, its ornate gazeboes, and its formal garden, is one of the most picturesquely perfect old mansions in the kingdom, essentially homelike in spite of its stateliness; and therein the Elizabethan architects showed their rare skill, they could build grandly and yet never forget that they were building a home.

Montacute is a relic of an earlier

day
When men lived in a grander way,
With ampler hospitality.

The very mottoes on the house tell of this. Over its entrance runs the hospitable legend:

Through this wide-opening gate
None come too early, none return too late.

What a welcome to the coming guest! And above the garden portal runs another legend that vies with it in open-handed hospitality, and thus it runs:

And yours, too, my friend.

Those were the days to live in!

I notice with pleasure that the good old fashion of carving mottoes over doorways is being revived to-day. But, alas! the mottoes on modern houses sadly lack originality, and few are quaint. Now I feel that such mottoes should express something of the character of the owner and not be mere repetitions of older ones that have served their day. The motto is the one thing that should not be left to the architect to provide; it should have a purely personal note.

CHAPTER XXI

Disappointed expectations—Chats by the way—A one-acre farm—The decayed town of Ilchester—The game of "Old Roger"—Sunshine and shower—The motor and the inn—Over Salisbury Plain—A story of the sea—Wayside monuments and their legends—Devizes.

Soon after leaving Montacute we discovered by a sign-post that we were bound for Yeovil. Till we saw that sign-post we had no idea where we were going, such a gloriously uncertain course we pursued. The only curb we placed upon Chance was to take from time to time the most inviting road that offered; perhaps that is why we so generally escaped large towns, for you mostly approach them by highways that are wide, dusty, and much travelled, and these we avoided as far as possible. When we had a highway or a by-way to select between, we always unhesitatingly chose the by-way. Now the by-way serves the villages and the little country towns, then there is the greater beauty and the peace of it.

I cannot say why, for of some things no reason can be given, but somehow we expected much of Yeovil. Perhaps its uncommon name had something to do with our expectations, for there is a magic in certain names, as Wordsworth found in that of

Yarrow. But Yeovil disappointed us. Of all Somerset towns it possesses the fewest outward signs of antiquity; the old town has a very modern, commercial look, and prosperous commercial towns do not appeal to the traveller in search of the beautiful. Doubtless the world has need of them, but that is a matter apart. Yeovil has little to show to the lover of the past beyond its fine church and two ancient inns, "The Castle" and "The George," to wit, the former of stone, the latter of half timber with some pretence of being picturesque. The "Castle" inn was originally a chantry house, we learnt, which will account for its quaint arched Tudor doorway. We were glad to escape from Yeovil into the pleasant country again, and very pretty the country round about it is.

A few miles on our way we pulled up the car for rest and refreshment at a lonely spot and beneath the grateful shelter of some overhanging trees. The quiet and solitude of the spot appealed to us. The air was still, and so great was the quiet that even the fall of a leaf could be heard. No one afoot or on wheels, not even a tramp passed us by. Our midday halts were generally undisturbed, for with a motor car you can usually choose some secluded spot out of even the sight of a human habitation. And a rest by the way with nothing but the real country around, what an enjoyable thing it is; and if by chance there be a pleasant footpath near, you may indulge in a leisurely stroll across the fields, as a pleasant change from so much driving.

Oftentimes on such occasions have I wandered about, over fields and down by-lanes, should there chance to be any, in search of some one to chat with, even though it were only a farmer's boy, for I have found but few rural folk who could not tell me something about the country, if merely the name of a bird, wild-flower, or plant, of which I was shamefully ignorant. But as often as not have I failed to find any rural folk to chat with during those wanderings, so solitary at times is the real country remote from towns. Once or twice I have trudged away to a distant and lonely cottage by the roadside only to discover it to be a deserted toll-house, a number of which still remain, mostly uninhabited and falling to decay, relics of the days when one could not indulge safely in any long drive without the price of a toll in one's pocket. Is there not an ancient story told of Dr. Scott, a former Master of Balliol, who when out driving one day failed to find about him the needful pence wherewith to pay "the gate," and so tried to get through on trust by stating who he was. Whereupon the toll-keeper is reported to have exclaimed, "Master of Balliol, be yer? I don't care what yer be Master of! If ye bain't master o' threepence, ye don't go through this gate!" And he didn't.

But when you do discover any rural folk to talk with, their talk is frequently interesting and even may prove profitable in its way; at any rate it serves to pass a few odd minutes pleasantly enough, and enables you to glean something of the more or less hidden life of the country dwellers at first hand, to

see into their minds and think for a time their thoughts. As an example of the quality of these wayside gossips that I always indulged in whenever the opportunity offered, I have taken the following at random from my note-book. By way of preface, I may say it happened one day, early on the journey, that strolling up a lane I came to a neat little cottage with a large and cared-for garden round it; a narrow stone-flagged path that led through the latter to the cottage door was lined with sweet-scented, old-fashioned flowers, and this it was that first attracted me. Then on the wicket gate I noticed carved in bold letters the words "Grata Quies," and I was struck at finding a Latin inscription there, for the cottage was old and unpretentious, and might have been a gamekeeper's abode, or even a superior farm-labourer's; it was no "cottage of gentility . . . that apes humility." In the garden was a middle-aged woman in a print dress and with a sun-bonnet on her head so busily weeding with her fingers, aided by a rusty old knife, that she did not observe me leaning over the gate. As an excuse for a short chat, I remarked I was surprised at seeing a motto in Latin on her gate. She looked up at me with a smile and said, "I'm so fond of the quiet country so I had it put there. The country folk don't understand Latin, but that does not trouble me. I lived in London the best part of my life until my health gave way, then I came into the country, where my heart always was. My neighbour, a farmer, had his wife in a London hospital recovering from an operation, and she

declared that it was like being in Paradise to be in a town again and to hear the constant roar of the traffic. She says that the quiet and dulness of the country almost drives her silly. She loves the noisy town, and I love the quiet country. It is just the same in religion or politics; people hold different views in the world." It struck me that I had come upon a character, and one who manifestly was not averse to gossip with a stranger, so I gladly let her talk on whilst I played the humble part of listener. After a time she grew even confidential. "I've taken this little cottage," she confided to me, "with an acre of ground so as to live in the country, and I pay £20 a year rent for the place. I used to be a dressmaker in London till my health failed, then I went down to a seaside resort and continued my business there. But I longed all the while for the country, so I looked out for a cottage there, found this one was to let, and took it. My father was a small landowner and a magistrate, but he lost nearly all his fortune farming. He was far too kind-hearted a man to make money. When poachers were brought before him and proved guilty he sent them to prison, because, as he explained, he was bound to do so, but whilst they were in prison he always kept their wives and families. So when my father died, being left without hardly any income, I pocketed my pride and turned dressmaker, being handy with my needle. It was better than living on friends. It's vastly easier to come down in the world than to get up in it again, at least for a woman. I wish I had been a

man; but wishing don't do anything in this world. I don't complain, though, for here I am at last leading a tranquil, healthy life. You may laugh at the idea and say it is impossible, but I am actually getting my living out of this acre of garden. My little income just pays the rent of the place, but that is all."

I duly congratulated her, and then she proceeded with manifest pride to explain, in some measure, how she did it. "I rear and fatten poultry," said she, "and sell eggs. I sent nineteen dozen last week to the nearest town, where a shopkeeper buys all I have to sell—eggs, fowls, vegetables, and fruit. 'Produce from our own farm daily,' he has a notice in his shop window; that's his romancing. Only that sometimes I have to wait for my money, I should do very well. Now I expect it will surprise you considerably to know that until three years ago I knew nothing about fowls or gardening, but such is a positive fact. To show you how hopelessly ignorant I was, and how clever I thought myself, I first tried to hatch my eggs in the kitchen oven, keeping it just warm, of course,—I wrapped the eggs in a blanket. That was a failure. My farming neighbours began to give me advice gratis, but they all told me at the same time that fowls could never be made to pay. They meant well, but were very dispiriting. Then I had an inspiration. I wrote to the Board of Agriculture in Whitehall for one of their pamphlets on poultry farming. They supply these without charge to whoever applies for them. Some are about the

rearing and fattening of pigs, some about the management of cows and a dairy, the keeping of sheep, and so forth; and when I got that pamphlet I studied it carefully, and by it learnt, with the aid of my garden produce, to make a little living out of this acre of ground. I keep one breed of birds for egg-laying, and another breed for fattening, which latter I call table birds. Then I do a bit of French gardening and force some early vegetables, for which I get a good price."

Then this clever and contented woman began a long-detailed description of how she brought up her chickens by batches of fifteen in a basket, so that not one got trodden or killed by a careless hen; how she reared and fed them; how she managed to grow early fruits and vegetables, and so forth in superabundance. And all the while she talked she kept busily weeding—no time was wasted. On glancing at my watch when I left, I was surprised to find that I had been there a whole half-hour, so easily was I entertained and so good a listener was I.

After this long digression, to return to ourselves. Rested and refreshed, we once more resumed our journey, and next we turned up at ancient Ilchester, now little better than a village, but erst a Roman station of importance and a walled town, where five roads converged, and do now for that matter, only their gateways with the walls have gone; gone also are four out of five of its great churches; gone also its once famous monastery where, in 1214, Roger Bacon, known as "Doctor Mirabilis," was born;

gone its nunnery; gone its fine Guildhall that faced its market-place; gone, too, its market-cross. Of its Roman walls no trace is left, and of its later fortified walls of the Great Rebellion days only some grass-grown mounds remain. Excepting for its one church, almost all its ancientness has vanished, and to the modern passer-by its past greatness seems as unreal as a dream. But one relic of its departed glories has been happily preserved in the shape of its quaint thirteenth-century mace-head, a unique and curious specimen of ancient craftsmanship. Ichabod is written large all over Ilchester. It is now but a place of memories. The railway has not discovered it—a pity if it did.

On a triangular green in the decayed town now rises a tall pillar with a square sun-dial at the top, and this marks the spot where erst stood its market-cross. Some children were playing the romping game of "Old Roger" there, an ancient game still much in vogue in the West Country, and one that is a near relation to that known as "Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St. Clement's." A Somerset parson, who has often seen this game of "Old Roger" played at children's gatherings in his parish, kindly gave me the words of the song that accompanies it, sung to an old folk-tune, and these are they. I am sorry that the tune I cannot give, for I was informed it was rather quaint—

Old Roger is dead and lies in his grave—
Hee-haw! lies in his grave.
They planted an apple-tree over his head.

The apples were ripe and ready to drop,
When came a big wind and blew them all off;
Then came an old woman a-picking them up.
Old Roger jumped up and gave her a knock,
Which made the old woman go hipperty-hop.

On coming to the line "Old Roger jumped up," then the fun of the game begins. Occasionally, I was told, the name of Oliver Cromwell is substituted for that of Old Roger, but this innovation does not find general favour. Who Old Roger is supposed to be I could not discover, nor anything as to the origin of the game. As to the ancient rhyme of "Oranges and lemons" there is some foundation, for on New Year's Day it was the custom of the staff of the old Clement's Inn to present oranges and lemons to the occupants of the chambers there, when the bells of St. Clement's always rang a joyful peal. So even the simple rhyme of a children's game or story-book may have a tale to tell, such as the one "London Bridge is broken down," which relates to the destruction of the early wooden bridge over the Thames by Olaf "the Saint," king of Norway, in the reign of the English king Ethelred. So at least two antiquarian friends have told me, on two separate occasions, when discussing old folk-lore and folk-song. Now, when two antiquaries or two theologians agree upon any one subject, I feel inclined to believe there must be some truth in it.

Leaving the half-forgotten and wholly sleepy town of Ilchester, a quiet stretch of country brought us to the tiny village of Sparkford and into a storm

of rain. At Sparkford we discovered a little unpretentious inn that made a bold display of "Post Horses" on its front, though I should as soon have thought of demanding turtle soup there as post horses. It was not exactly a millionaire's hotel, but it afforded us as good shelter from the downpour as the finest building in the land could do; it afforded us besides a welcome cup of tea, and tea of no mean quality. Not that we usually sought shelter from the weather, however bad the weather might be; but on this occasion the rain came on so suddenly and so heavily that we had not time to put the car hood up to protect us from it; so seeing a handy inn, we were not too proud to make use of it.

The rain over, we drove on through a delightful country of sloping meadows and shady woods, with pleasant peeps beyond of undulating hills, hills now near at hand, now far away, now darkly purple under the shadow of a passing cloud, now golden green in the glance of the sun. It was what artists call "a gleamy day," and a gleamy day is one to enjoy for its changeful beauties of light and shade Then passing through drowsy Wincanton, the country became more open and had a wilder look; and so we came to the little, interesting town of Mere, that stands aloof from the railway, but is none the less pleasant for that. At Mere we noticed the grand wrought-iron support to the sign of the Ship Hotel; we could not help but notice it, it was so large and fine and well designed, so much so that it gave quite a character to the quiet street.

On the top of it was an open crown as bright as new gilding could make it, and on the swinging sign below we read the legend, "Ye Old Coaching House." As I was sketching the sign the landlord came out and quaintly remarked that, though it was a famous old coaching house, still it accommodated motorists. We replied we were glad to hear that, and perhaps some other day, should we be passing that way, we might sample his entertainment. Then he invited us inside, "just to show how comfortable I could make you." Yet I remember in the early days of motoring being refused accommodation by the manager of a large county town hotel, because, as he politely remarked, pointing to the motor car, "We don't allow such dangerous things in our stables." To-day, at that very hotel, motorists are welcomed with open hands. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*

Just outside Mere we passed close by the foot of a solitary scarped hill that in the thirteenth century was crowned by a castle, a castle that failed to make history for itself. On referring to my *Paterson's Roads*, I find Mere thus described therein: "Though now only a small market town, it was formerly of considerable importance, and had a castle belonging to it which occupied the summit of an adjoining eminence. Very few traces of the fortress, however, now remain, but the knoll on which it stood is still denominated the Castle Hill." I find also that *Paterson* mentions the Ship Inn as being the inn of the place; indeed, nearly every old coaching hostelry that still exists retains its

ancient title as given in that famous pre-railway road book.

Driving on, we soon came into a bleak country of lonely downs, a country of billowy hills all open to the sky and to every wind that blows. Our way now lay across a lonely portion of Salisbury Plain, and very desolate it seemed to us that day. There are doubtless more desolate and more rugged districts amongst the moors, but it is the impression of the moment that concerns the traveller. Our road was rough, flinty, and narrow, and took us up on high ground and into a damp grey mist that brooded there, a mist that blotted out all the distance and the sunshine, and that seemed almost like a solid wall in front of us. Our road ahead was but the ghost of a road; we were driving into a land of mystery and silence. We were in a grey, green world; all above and around us was grey, all below was green. It was a wild, weird drive, but we enjoyed the wildness and the weirdness of it. An inhospitable country, yet it had a strange fascination for us. Not a country for choice to get lost or benighted in. As the author of the ever-delightful *Ingoldsby Legends* says—

> Oh, Salisbury Plain is bleak and bare,—
> At least so I've heard many people declare,
> For I fairly confess I never was there;—
> Not a shrub nor a tree, nor a bush can you see;
> No hedges, no ditches, no gates, no stiles,
> Much less a house, or a cottage for miles;—
> It's a very sad thing to be caught in the rain
> When night's coming on upon Salisbury Plain.

It is truly a region wherein you may drive for

miles and seek for shelter in vain. We did not know exactly whereabouts on the Plain we were, but we trusted to the road to lead us back to humanity again. The business of a road is to lead to somewhere, though our road became gradually so bad we feared lest it should either eventually lose itself on the dreary downs, or merely end at some stray hamlet or solitary farmhouse. Just to break the monotony of the loneliness, which at times became almost depressing, we sounded loud our horn; but no echo came back to us, and the sound was muffled by the mist, so that it only served to make the loneliness and the silence more profound. "Will the road never end?" exclaimed my wife. "We keep driving on and on and arriving nowhere." Perhaps at some far-distant day, when the motor car has become a thing of romance, we shall hear of a phantom car for ever travelling over the lonely Plain on a never-completed journey, a land rival of the *Flying Dutchman*. Writing of the *Flying Dutchman* tempts me to digress again, often though I have so sinned, to tell a true story thereof, the only veracious version of it I have ever heard. At least the story was told to me as true by a parson, who had it direct from a sailor who actually saw the ship of mystery. First, then, the story, then the simple explanation of it. Thus spake the sailor, honestly believing the tale he told: "We were rounding the Cape one stormy day, or rather trying to round it in vain. We had experienced dirty weather for days with nothing but head winds, and our old tub was continually being beaten back

with these and the heavy seas. Even our captain owned 'twas the worst weather he had ever encountered. Some of us got a-talking about the *Flying Dutchman*, but the captain would not hear of any such nonsense. Then I was on the watch late one afternoon, and, true as I stand here, I saw the *Flying Dutchman* hisself suddenly loom right out of the rain and like us trying in vain, as he has done for centuries, to round the Cape. The ship was of mighty curious old-fashioned build, so I knewed her at once. Then I sent for the skipper, and he too saw her as plain as I. 'That's her, right enough,' owned he, 'I never thought to see her. There's mischief brewing, sure enough'; and with that he ordered us about and sought safety in the nearest port, which none of us expected ever to see, but somehow we got there or I should not be here to tell the tale." Now for the solution of the apparition of the mysterious ship. The skipper and his crew had truly seen a strange craft of quaint old-fashioned build and rig vainly struggling, like themselves, to round the stormy Cape. Glimpsed struggling thus through the misty rain, it needed no great stretch of the sailors' imagination, after days of fruitless beating against the winds and the waves, to believe that the strange craft of a build so ancient that the like is never seen on the seas nowadays, was the veritable *Flying Dutchman*, and the cause of all their troubles. Perhaps even a less superstitious man than a sailor might, under the circumstances, have imagined this. Now it appears that a very old ship had been laid up and

almost forgotten in a small Australian port, a ship that had been employed long years ago for the transportation of convicts to Van Diemen's Land. Even at the time she was purchased by the Government of the day she was a slow out-of-date East Indiaman, but good enough for the purpose. Then finding that the ship could be had for a mere trifle, it occurred to some speculators that it might pay to purchase, refit, and make her sufficiently seaworthy, whilst retaining her antique look, to sail to the Old Country and to exhibit her there as an ancient convict ship; and this was the strange craft that the sailors saw storm-tossed and endeavouring to round the Cape. So ends a true story of the *Flying Dutchman*. Whether the ship ever succeeded in reaching England and was exhibited there, I know not; but that is not a part of the relation I am responsible, at third hand, for.

But to return to the simple chronicle of our tour. Over the dreary Salisbury Plain and through the mists we motored silently on and on, wondering when the road would arrive somewhere. Few roads really ever come to an end even in this sea-girt land of ours; they truly come to the sea, where they cease to go forward, but there they turn aside to the right or the left, and then they go on again. Still Salisbury Plain is not boundless, and so at last our road dropped down somewhat steeply into the village of Wylye. There we stopped to consult our map, for the day was growing old, and all around us was a wild country, so we deemed it wise—having the previously-quoted verse from the

Ingoldsby Legends in mind—to give a thought as to our night's quarters. By the map we discovered there was Salisbury somewhat to the south and Devizes almost to the due north of us. To reach Devizes we should have to travel another goodly portion of the open Plain; the road to Salisbury appeared to follow down a river valley, and so promised to be less bleak. But on tracing the road to Devizes on our map we noticed "St. John à Gore's Cross" plainly marked thereon close by the roadside, and at an apparently lonely spot. This aroused our curiosity, and inclined us to go that way. Who St. John à Gore was we knew not, nor why a cross had been erected to him there, if one had been. On my return home I endeavoured to enlighten my ignorance by consulting a modern guide-book to Wiltshire, but could find no mention of either that saint or cross therein, nor could I discover his name in any reference book, nor yet in any topographical work, old or new, and many were those I searched; but to the British Museum Library I have not been.[1] However, to hark back, the name on the map eventually decided our direction and destination. To Devizes we would go. We even began to picture in our mind's eye a tall, weather-worn, and weather-stained cross standing solitary by the wayside with some ancient inscription upon it to inform the ignorant passer-by of its purport. Even though we might be be-

[1] Since writing the above an antiquarian friend has unearthed for me the following information. At Gore stood a pilgrims' chapel dedicated to St. John, also probably a wayside cross. Hence possibly St. John à Gore's Cross.

nighted on the Plain, that cross we would endeavour to see, and learn if possible the history of it.

The portion of the Plain we traversed after Wylye was not so bleak nor so bare as that we had previously passed over, though it was lonely and bleak enough in parts, and the hurrying wind swept over it with a keenness that reminded us unwelcomely of March; a wind that whistled eerily as though there were an unseen presence there, and the wind was the voice of it, for solitude is apt to breed fanciful imaginings. All the way we kept a good look-out for St. John à Gore's Cross, and at one lonely spot we espied a wayside erection in the shape of an upright stone, old and grey, with a long inscription upon it. This must be the object of our search, we thought, although it is no cross, but only a rough carved monolith. But on dismounting to read the inscription, we discovered that it was merely a rude monument recording a murder committed there many years ago. There was nothing romantic about it. The legend on it runs as follows, though perhaps this is hardly worth transcribing. However, here it is—

At this Spot
Mr. Dean of Imper was
Attacked and Robbed by
Four Highwaymen in the
Evening of October 21st, 1839.
After a spirited pursuit of
Three hours one of the Felons
Benjamin Colclough
Fell dead on Chitterne Down.
Thomas Saunders
George Waters and

Richard Harris
Were eventually captured
And were convicted at the
Ensuing Quarter Sessions at
Devizes and Transported for
The term of Fifteen Years.
This monument is erected
By Public Subscription
As a warning to those who
Presumptuously think to
Escape the punishment God
Has threatened against
Thieves and Robbers.

Our ancestors appear to have been rather fond of erecting such wayside monuments at a spot where a murder, a robbery, a coach accident, or other untoward event had happened, for the traveller by road is frequently coming upon them. Near to Standon, on the road to Cambridge, in a meadow just off the highway, stands one of these monuments that in these days of flying possesses perhaps a special interest of its own. On this the inscription runs: "Let Posterity know, and knowing be astonished, that on the 15th day of September 1785, Vincent Lunardi of Lucca in Tuscany, the first aerial traveller in Britain, mounted from the Artillery Ground in London, and traversing the regions of the air for two hours and fifteen minutes, in this spot revisited the earth."

We still expected to come upon the cross, but no cross or any other erection of the kind did we see, and so passing through the pretty village of Potterne, which possesses some picturesque old half-timber houses and a fine church, we shortly

found ourselves in Devizes, where we pulled up at the old-fashioned and historic Bear Inn, and sought accommodation for the night. To our dismay, for we were tired with our long day's journey besides being famishingly hungry, we learnt that the hotel was full and not a room could they give us. However, we managed to stable our car and ordered some dinner, for it is poor sport to travel when hungry. Fortunately a motor car never tires, though its driver may. Still, counting on a rest and dinner, we felt we should be quite equal to another twenty miles or even more, which should bring us to another inn, where we might have better fortune in securing quarters. We did not feel inclined to grumble because Fate, for once, had proved unkind.

We had for company at dinner a gentleman and his wife, who I soon learnt were travelling about in search of a country home, and had that day come down by rail from London to inspect a small property in the neighbourhood, which, however, was not to their liking. Then, after a while, the man proceeded to pour out his wrath upon estate agents, who he declared for the past two years had sent him all over the country upon wild-goose chases. "You can have no idea till you have tried your hand at the game," said he to me, "what a difficult thing it is to find a country home that is at all desirable." "Perhaps you have too exacting an ideal before you," I ventured to remark. "I hardly think so," he responded; "all I require is a little estate of about two hundred acres, more or

less, with, if possible, an old house of moderate size and of some distinction, or a new house of architectural merit upon it; of ugly houses with so much land around them there are plenty in the market. I did not expect to drop upon a desirable property at once, but I've been hither and thither on the outlook for a place that would suit me for two years, and have not seen one." And he spoke like a man who had a grievance. I gathered that he required his prospective home to be on high ground, in a pretty country and in a healthy locality, on gravel soil or chalk, and beyond these simple requirements, the house must have some charm about it, a mere box of bricks and mortar was not his idea of a home; and in this I sympathised with him. He further told me that he had not specially limited the agents as to district. "I've allowed them plenty of scope," he said, "anywhere in a pretty country south of the Thames, and not less than thirty miles from town. I prefer the climate south of the Thames to that to the north of it. The estate agents have a host of promising places on their books, and they all look delightful in the photographs they show you of them, but photographs don't tell you everything: they don't tell you that one really picturesque and otherwise delightful old home is near a huge lunatic asylum; that another one otherwise attractive is within a short half-mile of a sewage farm; that another has a public footpath running close in front of the house; that another picture of a place, situated on high ground with lovely views from it, has

no reliable water-supply, and that the wells around generally run dry in the summer, and so forth. On every property I have inspected so far I have found the trail of the serpent. Of course there are plenty of most desirable and charming country homes in the land, only unfortunately none of these appear for sale." Certainly it seems passing strange, with a sufficient balance at one's bankers, that a country home with some charm about it should be such a difficult thing to come by. Indeed, I would not credit the difficulty, only that I had a somewhat similar experience a dozen years ago. Large estates with large mansions upon them were offered to me, but then I did not want, nor could I afford to purchase, an estate; nor did I desire to dwell in a mansion. A pretty cottage home facing to the south and the sunshine, unpretentious, but not too small, with a good garden, a little land besides, and a pleasant country around, is what I sought for, and sought in vain; but then I own I was rather exacting about the artistic qualities of the cottage and the picturesqueness of the country around; moreover, I was faddy about the drinking-water supply and sanitation. Again, also, I limited the area of my quest to my two favourite counties, where such cottage homes are much in demand.

CHAPTER XXII

An inn and its story—Doubtful weather—A lonely land—Beckhampton—A hill of mystery—Prehistoric relics—"The old Marlborough road"—Two famous coaching hostelries—Racing a thunderstorm—The run home.

Dinner done, I said to my wife, "I will glance at the map over a cigar and find where lies the nearest town. There's no hurry to leave; even now it is not quite dark, and, after all, I think a late evening drive will be very enjoyable. It's fortunate they are full here, otherwise we might have missed that pleasure." Till the end of the tour I was determined to look on the bright side of things; for though I spoke thus lightly, I had no special desire to go on. I had no quarrel with Fate, because for once, and in so small a matter, she had appeared unkind. But it happened that I never consulted the map after all, for before I had a chance to do so the landlord came to me with a smile, and I knew instinctively what that smile meant. "I find that you can have a room for the night," said he; "and our best one too. The gentleman and his wife you were talking with at dinner are unexpectedly leaving by a late train. So their room will soon be at your service." And the good-natured landlord

seemed as pleased as I at the welcome information he had to impart. I was glad I had not reproached Fate, even in my thoughts. Frown at her, and she frowns back at you; smile at her, and even though for the moment she looks glum, it is even chances that she will smile back at you in return. So that night, after all the uncertainty, we slept contentedly at the "Bear."

The "Bear" at Devizes, as my readers may be aware, is an inn with an interesting past, though I frankly confess I had no knowledge of its story until some time ago I read about it accidentally in an old book that chance threw in my way. In the coaching age it appears that a Mr. Lawrence was its landlord, a man who was much esteemed by the travellers of his day; and there it was that his son, who became Sir Thomas Lawrence, the famous portrait painter of Court beauties, first showed his genius, whilst still a boy, by drawing likenesses of his father's guests, to the gratification of many of them, and to the increase of his pocket-money. When wandering over the ancient inn, I espied, hanging on a wall, a framed letter that was written by this gifted artist. Though the ink of it is sadly faded, the words of it can still be read. Deeming this letter of sufficient interest to copy, I copied it, for it has reference to that former famous beauty and historic personage, the Lady Hamilton. Here, then, is a copy of the letter. Unfortunately it is undated, nor is there any clue thereon to show to whom it was written, and the drift of it is none too clear:—

OLD BOND STREET,
Thursday.

DEAR SIR—A particular friend of mine promised to get me introduced at Sir William Hamilton's to see this wonderful woman you have doubtless heard of. He has succeeded, but unfortunately has made an appointment for that purpose on Sunday next at half-past ten. What shall I do? I know it is a most gratifying thing to a painter's eye that can be, and I am frightened at the same time with the intimation that she will soon be Lady Hamilton and that I may not have another such opportunity; yet I do not know that I can receive greater pleasure than I should have in viewing the beautiful scenery of Nature. Send me your opinion on this (of whichever way it leans). As I know you are a special pleader, it shall be decisive.—I am, dear sir, your obliged servant, THOMAS LAWRENCE.

The next morning broke with a sullen sky; the barometer had fallen during the night, and had fallen much; the wind was from the south-west, and everything presaged rain. Now ostlers, I have discovered, are frequently no mean judges of local weather, though why they should be, I never could make out, but the fact remains, so I sought the ostler and asked his opinion about the day. The ostler was in a pessimistic mood. "We're going to have rain, and plenty of it," said he, after taking a hasty glance at what he could see of the sky from the stable-yard. However, our outing was nearing its end, duty called us back home, so come storm or shine we determined to get on.

Whilst helping to put the Cape-cart hood up the ostler remarked, "It be market-day here to-day; I expects as how we shall get a lot of cars coming in later on; many of the farmers in these parts come to

market in their own cars." This bit of accidentally acquired information fairly surprised me. For the moment I quite thought the ostler was having his little joke, but he declared that he was quite serious. "It don't pay for a man to joke who has to earn his living by the tips he gets," he explained. And the delicate reference to tips was not lost upon us. But fancy farmers, of all people, making use of the motor car that formerly they so despised, because it did not feed on oats and hay, nor need straw for its bed; things the farmers had to sell. For once it would appear that farming actually spelt prosperity, and glad I was to think it might be so.

To avoid the market crowd, we made an early start, and hit upon a road that led us once more across a portion of the dreary Salisbury Plain, looking doubly dreary that morning under the heavy, brooding sky. The louring, drifting clouds drooped down, now and again, till they seemed to touch the earth, and oppressed us with a feeling that something evil was going to happen, though nothing did. Then we came to Beckhampton, a lonely spot, where a large house faces the road that once was a famous coaching hostelry, and now forms part of a celebrated training establishment. There we came upon a number of horses out for exercise, which, at the sight and the sound of our car, promptly careered wildly all over the place, nearly unseating some of their riders, who looked unutterable things at us and uttered many unparliamentary remarks; but happily the wind wafted most of their choice expressions into space, and we went on our way

unconcernedly, merely venturing the polite response that it was an unpleasant day.

At Beckhampton we entered upon the main London and Bath road, and shortly afterwards the mysterious Silbury Hill came into sight, rising solitary out of the silent Plain: a mighty prehistoric mound, over the origin and purpose of which so many learned antiquaries have hotly disputed, some holding to one view, and some to another, which is not very enlightening to the lay mind. Some declare it is Roman, others as surely declare it is pre-Roman, but I fancy not one of them really knows anything about it. Its secret is wrapped up in the mist of ages. It is certainly the largest artificial mound in England, and possibly in Europe, and is impressive on account of its size and its impenetrable mystery. The writer of *Paterson's Roads* knows all about it, and this is what he says:—"Silbury Hill is the remains of a stupendous Roman barrow; it rises 170 feet in perpendicular height, and its form is the frustum of a cone; its diameter at the top being 105 feet, and at the base 500." But *Paterson*, though trustworthy as to roads, is not so trustworthy as to history. Certainly the Roman road that passed the hill which is identical with the present one deviated from the straight line to avoid it, an undisputed fact that suggests clearly to me a pre-Roman origin, and I hazard a guess that it dates from about the time that Stonehenge was raised. But Silbury Hill, Stonehenge, and Avebury are not the only relics around of a forgotten race, for dotted on these lonely downs are

many mysterious grass-grown mounds and "standing stones," reared in an age so remote that everything about them is a profound secret that probably will never be revealed.

Soon after Silbury we found ourselves in Marlborough, famous of old for its Castle Inn, one of the most luxurious and most expensive inns of its day,—an inn of many merry gatherings of notable people, whose feastings and gamblings there are a matter of history. Now it forms a portion of Marlborough College; so modern learning has usurped the place of old-time revelry.

> You may go round the world
> By the old Marlborough road,

form two lines of a verse that I saw quoted in a magazine the other day. In my ignorance, I cannot "place" the poem or its author; but what puzzles me is how any one could go round the world on a road, and why especially on the Marlborough road? It may be poetic licence to sing so, but I think it is somewhat straining that licence.

Climbing the long hill out of Marlborough, we passed through Savernake forest, where only woods and sky were to be seen; and delightful must be the green shade of its trees on a sunny summer day, but just then no sun was shining, so its glades had a gloomy look. The sky was leaden, the forest was dreary, and the wind wailed sadly through its pillared aisles as it shook the wet in showers from its dripping leaves. Yet there was a certain fascination in the gloom and the dreariness of the scene.

So we drove on till we reached the little town of Hungerford, where we noticed the ancient and historic Bear Inn as we passed by, another of the many renowned coaching hostelries that erst dotted the old Bath road,—probably the most ancient of them all, for it is said to date back to the thirteenth century. At the "Bear" Queen Elizabeth rested in 1556 awhile when on a visit to Littlecote, a house to which the tragic story of Will Darell, or "Wild" Darell as he was generally called, is attached, a story that has been so often related that it needs no repetition here. At the "Bear," too, William of Orange met James's Commissioners from London on 8th December 1688, and he and they also went on to Littlecote the next day, further to discuss affairs; all of which is a matter of history. The old inns of Old England have had their frequently forgotten share in the stirring events of past days. Kings and queens have often stopped in them, notably Queen Elizabeth and Charles I., and Cromwell visited many a one.

Nine miles of pleasant country now brought us to Newbury, a town that has happily managed to retain much of its ancientness. There, too, formerly flourished still another famous inn, to wit, "The Pelican," at Speenhamland; Speenhamland being then a sort of inn-suburb of Newbury. A hostelry where the fare was of the best, where the wine was reputed to be as good as, or even better than, any the king had in his cellars, where it was said that "only lords could afford to stop at," for its high charges were the talk of the road; but that was a

long while ago, now the inn is no more. Pepys dined there, and was, as he plaintively puts it, "forced to change gold." And Quin wrote a verse about it, which, though frequently quoted, will bear quoting again, and this is what Quin indited :—

> The famous inn in Speenhamland
> That stands below the hill,
> May well be called the Pelican
> From its enormous bill.

At Newbury we bade good-bye to the Bath road, forward would take us to Reading and London, and we preferred the countryside and a more country road than the highway and its traffic. So we turned to the right and took a south-easterly course as far as the by-roads permitted in the direction of home, for to home we were bound on the morrow. After Newbury we struck upon a quiet homelike country, and this brought us without incident to Basingstoke. Beyond Basingstoke we came into a remote-looking and well-wooded land. Our road was none of the best, being narrow and winding, but the scenery was very charming and restful, and even the sun made at last a feeble attempt to shine just to cheer us on our way. Then presently in the shelter of some deep woods we pulled up the car and sampled the contents of our luncheon basket. I think these alfresco entertainments were one of the most enjoyable features of our tour, for as we always selected some out-of-the-way spot, we could take our fill of the charms of the quiet country undisturbed. We rested, or rather lazed, longer than usual that day, so it was late in the afternoon

before we resumed our journey. Our pleasant outing was coming to an end; we wished to make the best of the little time that remained to us. Our pleasures always seem to come to an end quicker than our pains.

We drove leisurely on, for the country was too pretty to hurry through. The slowness of our pace proved the pleasantness of the scenery. Then presently we heard a peal of thunder, loud and prolonged, that woke us out of our dreaming, and looking back we saw great banks of angry-looking clouds rapidly overtaking us. The signs of a coming storm were only too manifest; the barometer had not fallen nearly an inch during the previous night for nothing. The thunder grew louder still,—it was loud enough before; one blinding flash of lightning made me think whether a motor car were the safest place to be in during a heavy thunderstorm; but there was little use in thinking, there we were, and there was no sign of an inn or of even a house on our lonely road wherein to seek shelter from the worst of the weather; and the hail rattled on the Cape-cart hood a positively deafening tattoo. There was nothing for it but to drive on, and we drove on as fast as we could make the car safely go; then suddenly we came upon a wide cross road that looked like a main road, which it proved to be, and turning to the left along this, we were thankful to find ourselves in a little town, which we afterwards learnt was Alton, for at the moment we had no idea where we were. We drove to the first inn we saw, straight into its stable-yard, and unceremoniously

into a coach-house that chanced to be vacant there. Then the storm broke forth in all its fury. I had no idea that our English climate could sound the loud drum so. I have only seen such rain fall as fell that day during a blizzard in the wild Western States of America, in Colorado to be precise, and, of course, the Americans do everything on a grand scale; but for once the old country did not have to play second fiddle in this respect. I do not know what a battlefield is like with the constant roar of artillery and small arms, but it seemed to me it could hardly be worse in sound and turmoil than that warfare of the elements. As we expected, we read long accounts of the storm in the papers next day and the death and damage wrought by it, and we did not even get a wetting, thanks to our Cape-cart hood.

Then we rushed in to the hotel and found we had not only been fortunate in obtaining safe shelter from the storm, but fortunate in finding a most delightful hostelry. An old coaching inn that had been restored and refurnished, thanks to the revival of road traffic, and furnished in taste too. I ask for comfort at my inn, but I do not expect taste in fittings and furniture; here we had both. We even forgave the storm for having caused us to discover such desirable quarters; and a really good inn is a blessing to man. Not only was our inn much to our liking, but we met there pleasant company in the shape of a stray and chatty parson and a party of four sociable motorists, weather-bound like ourselves. So we rested there the night and let the

weather do its worst—and it did its worst, but it only emphasised the comfort and quiet of our inn.

The next morning broke gloriously fine, the sun was shining brilliantly out of a pure blue sky, there was hardly a cloud to be seen, so changeful is our English weather; the day indeed was almost Italian in the glory of its brightness. The air was fresh and wonderfully clear, but the roads were miry; however, we should be free from dust, that "fly in the ointment" of the road traveller after prolonged dry weather; yet after all not much of a fly to those who choose the pleasant by-roads and the leafy lanes that moreover have the virtue of leading one right into the heart of the real country. It was the last day of our holiday, and therein its sole sadness lay; still we were returning home, and there is a magic and a meaning in that word that every Englishman should understand. It spells peace, or should do so. "The domestic man," says Emerson, "who loves no music so well as the tick of his own clock and the airs which the logs sing to him as they burn on the hearth, has solaces of which others never dream." And of the uses of travel, perhaps the greatest of all is to freshen our love of home.

We made an early start; who would stay within walls on such a day? Again we took a south-easterly direction over a road that was hilly, and through scenery that was delightful, and so we reached Petersfield. Then over familiar roads, though none the less beautiful because familiar, we drove to Midhurst, but did not stop there to view

the interesting and picturesque ruins of Cowdray, because we had seen them thrice before. Then passing through Petworth and Pulborough, we came to Steyning, and from Midhurst to Steyning there is not a more beautiful drive in all the fair land of Sussex; the whole way is a succession of pictures. In turn followed Shoreham and its shipping, with its old Norman church, whose tower, grey with age and worn by the salt winds and winter frosts of forgotten years, still stands strong and firm, a testimony to the honest work and skilled craftsmanship of its long dead builders. Next we came to modern Brighton, which seemed to our eyes more modern than ever after our wanderings amongst the old-fashioned, dreamy, little country towns and somnolent villages that dot this pleasant land of ours, and over all of which there broods a past peace that is so grateful to a quiet mind. From Brighton a short drive took us to ancient Lewes, with its scarred and battered castle, whose ivied keep on its lone height still proudly dominates the red-roofed town below; thence we took our way along the foot of the rounded downs. So we reached Eastbourne and home again, and our pleasant pilgrimage was but a memory, yet, to slightly alter Virgil and to put his words into the plain English tongue, "No day shall take away from us the delight of that memory."